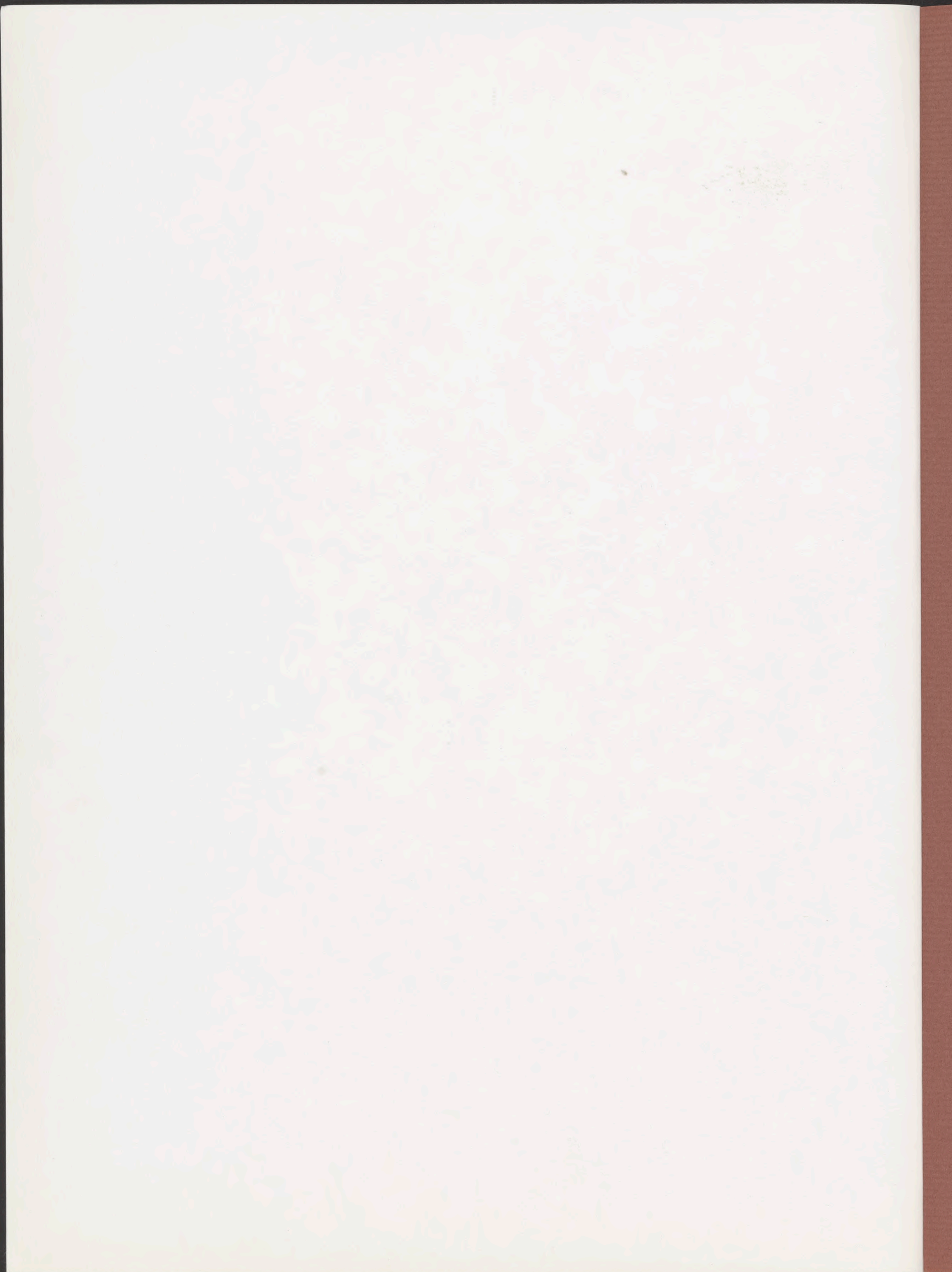
The background of the entire page is an oil painting. It depicts an artist's studio. On the left, a wooden easel holds a canvas showing a landscape with tall, dark evergreen trees in the foreground and a hazy, mountainous horizon. In the lower right foreground, a wooden artist's palette is visible, with several paintbrushes resting on it. The palette contains various colors of paint, including white, yellow, red, and blue. The overall style is soft and atmospheric, characteristic of 19th-century landscape painting.

The Painted Sketch

AMERICAN
IMPRESSIONS
FROM NATURE
1830-1880







Our artists are quite generally “out of town” — which means gone to the antipodes, or anywhere else that a good sketch can be had. The hope of *that* great picture, of which every artist dreams, sends them into every imaginable locality in quest of *the* sketch. They straddle mountains, ford rivers, explore plains, dive into caves, gaze inquisitively into clouds (not always, we are sorry to say, into Heaven), sail seas, run into icebergs, scald themselves in Amazonian valleys—always returning safely home in the golden October, with a lean pocket and a plethoric portfolio, ready for commissions *and* praise. The Hegira, this season, is quite general; the studios are all ticketed “closed.” . . . We sincerely hope to be able to announce the safe return and good health of this tribe of devotees, and shall await with an eager anxiety the pleasure of going into the depths of their portfolios.



The Painted Sketch

AMERICAN IMPRESSIONS FROM NATURE
1830-1880

by Eleanor Jones Harvey

Dallas Museum of Art

The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830–1880 was organized by the Dallas Museum of Art. The exhibition, publication, and related programs are supported by a generous grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.

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Front cover: Daniel Huntington, *Portrait of Asher Brown Durand* (detail), 1857. Oil on canvas, 56½ × 44 in. The Century Association, New York (cat. 16).

Back cover: Frederic Edwin Church, *Mount Katahdin*, ca. 1856. Oil on canvas, 8½ × 11¾ in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts (gift of Winslow Ames [PA 1925] in memory of Edward Winslow Ames [PA 1892]) (cat. 26).

Frontispiece and spine: Sanford Robinson Gifford, *The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine* (detail), 1864–65. Oil on canvas, 11 × 19 in. Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr. (cat. 60).

Contents

| | |
|-----|--|
| 6 | Foreword |
| 8 | Acknowledgments |
| 12 | Lenders to the Exhibition |
| 15 | Introduction |
| 25 | Chapter One: <i>The Artist in the Field</i> |
| 47 | Chapter Two: <i>The Alchemy of the Studio</i> |
| 63 | Chapter Three: <i>The Oil Sketch on Display</i> |
| 83 | Chapter Four: <i>Collecting the Painted Sketch</i> |
| 99 | Chapter Five: <i>The Oil Sketch as Art</i> |
| 113 | Catalogue |
| 278 | Selected Bibliography |
| 289 | Checklist of the Exhibition |
| 291 | Index |

Foreword

It is always a pleasure to rediscover an aspect of an artist's career that surprises the eye and delights the mind. The landscape painters known as the Hudson River school have long been heralded for their Great Pictures, yet these artists painted an astonishing number of powerful and breathtakingly beautiful works on a much smaller scale, often out-of-doors. The painted sketches by Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, Sanford Robinson Gifford, and their colleagues are admired by modern audiences, who are captivated by the lively brushwork and intimate scale of these small works. What may be surprising is the discovery that some of these gems were exhibited to great praise and sold to collectors during the artists' lifetimes. The Dallas Museum of Art is proud to present *The Painted Sketch: American Impressions from Nature, 1830–1880*, the first exhibition devoted to oil sketches painted by eight of America's leading painters of the Hudson River school. *The Painted Sketch* addresses the aesthetic appeal of these sketches while establishing their historical importance.

Eleanor Jones Harvey has researched the works of American landscape painters for more than a decade, concentrating on their oil sketches and how these small paintings became accepted by nineteenth-century critics and patrons as independent works of art. In doing so she has brought together insights on each artist's life and career and the development of the market for both their Great Pictures and their small sketches. What emerges in *The Painted Sketch* is a picture of the shift in aesthetics during the nineteenth century that led to American interest in tonalism and impressionism, and ultimately to an acceptance of these sketches as independent works of art. She has approached this project as both connoisseur and scholar, finding in these paintings the keys to understanding this development. The Dallas Museum of Art takes great pride in presenting the fruits of her research in this groundbreaking book and exhibition.

The Henry Luce Foundation awarded a generous grant to the Dallas Museum of Art to fund aspects of *The Painted Sketch*. Its support was crucial for research, travel, and for the publication of this important book. Early interest in this exhibition expressed by our colleagues at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, confirmed the significance of this project and facilitated negotiation of many of the loans.

Our sincere thanks go to the many lenders, both public and private, who have graciously lent their paintings to this exhibition. Their generosity has made it possible to bring together a select group of the oil sketches that were among the earliest to be acknowledged as works of art. We are pleased that visitors here and in Washington and Williamstown will have the opportunity to appreciate these gems in a context that is both intellectually stimulating and aesthetically rewarding.

Jay Gates

The Eugene McDermott Director, Dallas Museum of Art

Acknowledgments

Ten years ago I began work on my dissertation; out of that project grew this book and the exhibition it accompanies. Along the way I have received generous assistance from many people, and it is with great pleasure that I offer them my thanks.

I spent many delightful hours poring over countless oil sketches in a group of museums housing extraordinarily rich collections of these works. Olana State Historic Site, Frederic Edwin Church's home in Hudson, New York, and the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, in New York City, share the majority of the artist's sketches. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the Stark Museum of Art in Orange, Texas, each has impressive collections of Albert Bierstadt's oil sketches. The New-York Historical Society's extensive holdings of Asher B. Durand's works include sketches from his entire career. The Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, includes Jasper Francis Cropsey's studio. Two individuals have also been enormously helpful: Dr. Sanford Gifford, who has been a generous source of information on his ancestor; and Alexander Acevedo, who has provided invaluable material on Thomas Cole.

Many museum colleagues assisted me with visits to see sketches and archives. Because some have moved to new positions, they are listed here with the institutions to which they were attached when they were so generous with their help. They include Tammis K. Groft, The Albany Institute of History and Art; Milan Hughston, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth; Liza Kirwin, Garnett McCoy, and Judith Throm, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Judith Barter, The Art Institute of Chicago; James H. Nottage, Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles; Shelby Mattice, Bronck Museum, Coxsackie, New York; Linda S. Ferber and Barbara D. Gallati, Brooklyn Museum of Art; Sarah Boehme, Peter Hassrick, and Elizabeth Holmes, Buffalo Bill Historical Center; Jonathan P. Harding, The Century

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Frederick D. Hill, and Bruce Weber, Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc.; Paul Provost and Andrew Schoelkopf, Christie's; Thomas Colville, Colville Fine Paintings, Inc.; Priscilla Caldwell and Virginia Dunning, James Graham & Sons; Eric Baumgartner, Stuart Feld, and M. P. Naud, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc.; Vance Jordan, Vance Jordan Fine Art; the late Lawrence Fleischman and Martha Fleischman, Kennedy Galleries, Inc.; Andrea Keough, Scully-Keough Fine Art; Mary Lublin, Mary Lublin Fine Arts, Inc.; James H. Maroney; Lily Downing Burke, Gerald Peters, and Reagan Upshaw, Gerald Peters Gallery, New York and Santa Fe; Dara Mitchell, Peter Rathbone, and Ann Walker, Sotheby's; Gavin Spanierman, Spanierman Gallery; Katherine Baumgartner and Deedee Wigmore, D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc.; Suzanne Smeaton and Eli Wilner, Eli Wilner & Co.; and Susan Menconi and Richard York, Richard York Gallery. Dealers located elsewhere I would like to thank are John H. Garzoli, Garzoli Gallery, San Rafael, California; Allan J. Kollar, A. J. Kollar Fine Paintings, Seattle; Meredith Long, Meredith Long and Co., Houston; and Abbott W. Vose and Robert C. Vose III, Vose Galleries of Boston.

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At the Dallas Museum of Art I would like to thank director Jay Gates and deputy director and chief curator Charles L. Venable for their support of this project, and Roxann Garcia for convincing the Luce Foundation to fund it. My thanks also to Debra Wittrup and Suzy Sloan Jones for exhibition and publication coordination; Rick Floyd, Shirley Reece-Hughes, and Christine

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The Henry Luce Foundation provided a generous grant for this book and the accompanying exhibition. Without its support, this project would not have come to fruition. My thanks go to Ellen Holtzman, Programs Officer, for her encouragement.

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Lenders to the Exhibition

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy,
Andover, Massachusetts

Jan and Warren Adelson

Alexander Gallery, New York

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

The Art Institute of Chicago

Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles

Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc., New York

Bronck Museum, Greene County Historical Society,
Coxsackie, New York

Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming

The Century Association, New York

Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,
Smithsonian Institution, New York

Denver Art Museum

The Denver Public Library

Mr. and Mrs. Stuart P. Feld

Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.

Mr. and Mrs. Holcombe T. Green, Jr.

Mr. and Mrs. James Berry Hill

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
Smithsonian Institution

Thomas Lee and Ann Tenenbaum

Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College,
Poughkeepsie, New York

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

National Academy Museum, New York

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson, Wyoming

The New-York Historical Society, New York

Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks,
Recreation and Historic Preservation

Mrs. John W. Pearson

Arthur J. Phelan

The Saint Louis Art Museum

The George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield,
Massachusetts

The Toledo Museum of Art

D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc., New York

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

and various private collectors who wish to remain anonymous



Introduction

The practice of outdoor oil sketching was an integral part of landscape painting in nineteenth-century America. Armed with their sketch boxes, artists took to the open air in search of inspiration and to teach themselves to paint. Their sketches range from rapidly painted effects of light and weather to carefully limned studies of individual forms, depending on the circumstances of their making and the habits of the artist. With the rise of landscape painting and the enthusiastic press coverage of artists' travels, critics and collectors began to value these painted sketches as works of art, apart from their usefulness to the artist in composing another painting. Sketches painted out-of-doors and in the studio emerged as works of art worthy of exhibition and sale during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when the art market enjoyed a surge in the number of collectors eager to acquire paintings. Between 1830 and 1880 oil sketches, notably of landscapes, became fixtures in exhibitions at the National Academy of Design, studio soirées, and collectors' homes. This book and the exhibition it accompanies address the questions of how they got there and what role they played in the "sketch v. finish" debate. The answers help us evaluate the developing public appreciation for the painterly qualities of the sketch and, ultimately, how painted sketches earned the status of works of art in their own right.

Although it is tempting to read into these works a spontaneous and instinctive approach to painting, in truth the oil sketch is the arena in which the artist makes his first calculated decisions regarding the creation of a work of art. Painting outdoors, in front of the motif, or in the studio, the artist begins to edit and interpret nature's forms. This lends the sketch a palpable individuality that provides an intimate view into the artist's creative process,

which contributed to its growing popularity among collectors during the nineteenth century and for the modern-day preference for such works over their larger and more highly finished counterparts.

Over the last forty years scholarship on American landscape paintings has treated the sketch principally as part of the progress toward a finished easel painting, paying closest attention to the role it plays in the journey from field to studio. This approach makes good sense, particularly in the context of reacquainting ourselves with the nuts and bolts of an artist's life: where he went, what he saw, and what he painted. This in turn allows us to pay singular attention to the oil sketch as a significant aspect of an artist's career. In the case of Frederic Edwin Church, this focus has yielded several impressive exhibitions devoted to his painted sketches, which placed the emphasis on an appreciation of the intrinsic aesthetic qualities of each sketch, rather than how a sketch relates to an easel painting.¹ The recent monographic exhibition of Albert Bierstadt's work, too, included oil sketches displayed as finished works, highlighting their independence from the artist's working method.² In each case, the sketches represented works deemed more fresh and lively than the easel paintings that established the artist's reputation. The inherent danger in this approach has been to perceive in these diminutive works a prescient modernity, attuned as we are to high levels of abstraction and painterly flourishes in works of all scale. What has been missing from these projects is the understanding of how the oil sketch made this transition from a private *aide-mémoire* to an independent work of art in the eyes of the artists and their contemporaries.

Landscape painting was the preeminent genre in America during the mid-nineteenth century. This exhibition concentrates on the leading landscape painters working between 1830 and 1880, notably Church, Bierstadt, and Sanford Robinson Gifford. All three were inspired by Thomas Cole's example, and each matured under Asher B. Durand's presidency of the National Academy of Design, yet all were essentially self-taught, developing early on a highly individualized style of painting and an idiosyncratic method of recording nature in preparation for an easel painting. Works by their colleagues John Frederick Kensett, Jasper Francis Cropsey, Worthington Whittredge, and Jervis McEntee provide additional insight and commentary on the development of American landscape painting, for each

of these artists shaped the genre. Far from presenting a unified approach to painting the landscape, their oil sketches reveal widely divergent agendas, thereby providing a cross section of working methods and ambitions that effectively define the parameters of mid-nineteenth-century landscape painting during the shift from a Hudson River school aesthetic to that of American impressionism. These diminutive works also reveal a previously underappreciated view of the art market, specifically how an artist created and maintained his persona, the carefully crafted image of his artistic abilities and his personal curiosity and ambition.

The first chapter follows the artists into the field. Inspired in part by Durand's "Letters on Landscape Painting" published in the *Crayon* in 1855, aspiring landscape painters took to the open air. Plein-air oil sketching required equipment that was portable and convenient, since it was used under wildly variable conditions of light and weather, and demanded of the artist physical endurance and manual dexterity first to reach his subjects and then to record them. The hazards accompanying such ventures, whether to the Catskills or the Andes, made for exciting reading in art journals and encouraged public interest in the sketches resulting from the artist's travels.

Chapter two considers how artists returning from the field used their plein-air work to develop a highly personal way of working. In the studio they transformed presumably raw data into a work of art, a process deemed alchemical by reviewers and patrons alike. Artists continued to sketch in oils as they adapted their earlier impressions to satisfy the public need for more traditionally organized compositions. For some artists the studio served as a private sanctuary for just such a process, while for others it evolved into a quasi-public exhibition space. Oil sketches often adorned the walls as trophies captured in distant venues, serving as inspiration for both the artist and his patrons. The freshness and verve of these works attracted critics and collectors precisely for those characteristics that, at the time, denied them the status of a work of art. However, some of the oil sketches praised as plein-air efforts, notably by Church, Kensett, and Gifford, were studio creations based on fieldwork. For the artist, whether or not he adopted plein-air painting as part of his regular working method was less important than the perception provided by the paradigm of working out-of-doors, directly at nature's source.

Gradually, and under carefully controlled circumstances, these oil sketches made their way into the public domain, where they became established as affordable, and sometimes preferred, examples of the artist's work. The third and fourth chapters chronicle the growing interest in and market for artists' painted sketches. Under Durand's presidency, the National Academy of Design (NAD) devoted a "sketch room" to such efforts, including his own studies from nature. Few people today realize that Church never sent a Great Picture to the NAD. (The "Great Picture" was a very particular phenomenon in both Britain and the United States, involving a campaign of orchestrated publicity, fee-based admissions, and a tour of various cities, commensurate in scale and ambition with the painting itself.) On occasion he would exhibit an oil sketch as a "teaser" for a forthcoming attraction, which would debut elsewhere. Artists' receptions at Dodworth's Hall and the Tenth Street Studio Building became alternatives to the Academy as venues for display and sale. Oil sketches also served as the basis of engravings published in articles and books and became a popular feature at events including charity auctions and social-club exhibitions. Collectors requested and acquired these sketches for larger paintings and sometimes specifically requested plein-air works for their collections. Samuel P. Avery and the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon were among those who developed notable collections of oil sketches; both hosted parties to show off their newest purchases to fellow enthusiasts.

Perhaps no other event propelled these works into the public domain more effectively than the memorial exhibitions and estate sales held after an artist's death. Oil sketches by Cole, Durand, Kensett, and Gifford were displayed and sold from just such sales to fellow artists and patrons, or given by family members to museums. The final chapter explores the emergence of the oil sketch, in particular the more abstract, broadly brushed sketch, as a source of aesthetic enjoyment for a public audience. The formation of the Society of American Artists in 1877 represented the first formal step in the United States toward recognition of the oil sketch as a significant work of art, capable of conveying the artist's intent as well as, or in some cases better than, a larger and more elaborately painted canvas.

This still leaves open the question, just what is a sketch? The flexibility of the language used to describe and define sketches exposes the complexity behind so

simple a query. Issues of function, intent, medium, and size are the most common determinants used to separate one type of artistic endeavor from another. Sketches are often distinguished from finished paintings first on the basis of size. In general, the smaller the work, the more acceptable the label *sketch*, particularly when the surface brushwork is animated or the support is a material like paper. An equally important consideration concerns the relation between these works, what their order is relative to one another in the creative process. The gradual dislocation of sketches from this fundamentally linear progression occurred as patrons recognized that a sketch may represent the culmination of the artist's intent and, regardless of whatever auxiliary use it served, may have the same aesthetic appeal as an easel painting. Further, artists and their critics began to acknowledge openly that the sketch may achieve an integrity lost or dulled by the repetitive action involved in recasting the original, and therefore is itself a work of art superior in quality to the later, more finished version.

In France, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts had codified a sliding scale of preliminary works as early as the eighteenth century. For example, the progression from *croquis* to *esquisse* to *pochade* to *étude* designated the amount of detail and the level of surface finish these different sketches and studies displayed. A *croquis* was a rapidly limned thumbnail sketch, perhaps made of only a few lines that caught the essence of an idea for a composition. An *esquisse* was a cursory preliminary sketch designed to flesh out that idea. The *pochade* was a sketch concentrating on the range of light, color, and effect in a composition, while an *étude* was a reference study of an isolated aspect of nature: trees, animals, figures, and clouds, for instance, that could be quoted directly in a finished painting. The categories did not end there, and each was defined in terms of its function within the clearly delineated academic process of making a painting. Sketching in oils was used to develop the ability to paint, which would then be harnessed to the intellect in the studio to facilitate the creation of a finished work of art.³

Discussion of sketch and finish formed the bulwark of European theoretical treatises and academic training. In London, Sir Joshua Reynolds held sway over the direction of aesthetic thought. His fifteen Discourses, delivered to the Royal Academy students between 1768 and 1790, constituted the most widely read treatises on art produced in Britain. Reynolds wrestled with the

difficult question of sketch versus finish, whether the importance of a work of art lay in what the artist intended or in the viewer's ability to find meaning in the painted forms. At issue was the appearance of the painting's surface—its *finish*—as well as the degree of conceptual *completion* assessed purely on intellectual grounds. Finish was a quality ascribed to a painting as a product of the artist's diligent study of his craft: the ability to render a surface smooth and unbroken by visibly impasted paint. A highly finished painting denied the presence of the artist by consciously removing all traces of his hand, enabling viewers to address the work more directly with their mind. *Finish* as a concept linked to a painting's surface texture was separate from *completion*, which referred to the level of intellectual profundity evinced by the painting's narrative structure. Finish and completion were important for American viewers and critics as well, but most discussion concentrated on "want of finish," which served as a pejorative term condemning cursory handling of both paint and ideas.

These theoretical issues played an important role in American art criticism and instruction, particularly during the early years of the National Academy of Design. When Samuel F. B. Morse helped found the NAD in 1825, he hoped to replicate the system in place at London's Royal Academy. Morse and his colleagues, notably Durand, worried about American artists' striving to reach artistic maturity without rigorous formal schooling. By midcentury it was clear that American artists received as much advice from articles published in periodicals like the *Crayon* and the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* as they did from the Academy. The authors—usually artists and critics—wrote at length about proper painting practice but tended to define terms loosely and in a highly idiosyncratic manner. As a result, American parlance relied on context and sensibility, creating nuances of meaning difficult to define.⁴ The principal terms used were *study* and *sketch*. The distinction between them is at heart semantic. The language used in drawing books, art treatises, and critical literature was deliberately weighted toward *study* as a work whose creation used the intellect, reflection, and aesthetic judgment. By contrast, the term *sketch* connoted a work engendered by the brief, explosive moment of untutored genius, a highly charged, intensely personal response to a scene or event. Often more broadly painted, commensurate with the level of emotion and adrenaline involved in its making, the sketch harbored ideas only the artist

could translate into intelligible form, in either a study or a finished work. Studies gave the public easy access to a look over the artist's shoulder as he contemplated a future canvas or commemorated a finished one. Sketches gave the viewer the sense of intimacy and voyeurism associated with looking through a diary or into the artist's mind.

Between 1830 and 1880 a large portion of American art criticism was directed at landscape painters. Their frequent sojourns into nature represented time away from the disciplines of figure drawing and compositional study, still the backbone of academic training. Plein-air work in effect relocated the artist's studio or atelier from the city to the countryside and was seen in both Europe and America as the near equivalent of removing the artist from society. The attempt to distinguish between landscapists' *studies* and *sketches* addressed the perception voiced by one correspondent for the *Crayon*: "Landscape is too often regarded as a sort of safety-valve, to let off the exuberant efforts of those who are either too idle, or indifferent, to endure the restraint of study."⁵ Little wonder, then, that Durand preferred to call his plein-air works *studies* from nature. He invoked the language of education, thought, and reflection; in his parlance sketches were defined primarily as rapid shorthand, a tool successful only for mature artists who could dash off such works without reducing them to meaningless scribbles.⁶ It was a deliberate distinction, employed to elevate his fieldwork to the level of finished works of art while maintaining the cachet associated with plein-air execution and direct observation of nature.

In America, the discussion of sketch and finish extended to the realm of the nation's cultural progress, evaluated in the appearance of the actual as well as the depicted landscape. In 1852 several of the leading men of arts and letters oversaw the publication of *The Home Book of the Picturesque*, a gift book conceived to raise the level of appreciation for native scenery. In its essays by William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, the Reverend Magoon, Bayard Taylor, N. P. Willis, and Henry Tuckerman alternated with engravings of paintings by Durand, Kensett, Cropsey, and other landscapists. Cooper's essay, titled "American and European Scenery Compared," offered this analogy between the actual landscape and its pictorial counterpart:

The great distinction between American and European scenery, as a whole, is to be found in the

greater want of finish in the former than in the latter. . . . The greater natural freedom that exists in an ordinary American landscape, and the abundance of detached fragments of wood, often render the views of this country strikingly beautiful when they are of sufficient extent to conceal the want of finish in the details, which require time and long-continued labor to accomplish.⁷

The issue of "finish" in the landscape served as a potent metaphor for the sophistication of America's citizens as well as its art. Finish as a description applied to the land itself was linked to the industrious and patriotic virtues of its inhabitants; as a characteristic of painting it was linked directly to the artist's level of industry. Conscientious, sustained effort in the field helped the artist convince his patrons that his studio efforts were the product of an equal expenditure of talent and hard work.

The discussion about finish and completion gave rise to a hybrid creature, the *finished sketch*. It was a term invoked to praise a painted sketch that the artist had brought to pictorial completion—a fully painted surface, with enough care in the composition and resolution of individual forms to be legible, and in some cases exhibit-able. Often the finished sketch and the preliminary compositional study were treated as fraternal twins, nearly identical in meaning. The function sometimes elided the salient distinction: if an artist employed a finished sketch as a guide for an easel painting, it became a preliminary study.

Whether an artist sketched or studied the landscape, he was supposed to be working out-of-doors, preferably *sur le motif*, in front of the selected object or vista. This is the classic definition of plein-air work. However, there were times in the course of an artist's journeys when true plein-air painting was impossible, and the artist painted his oil sketches in a hotel room or after returning home, based on his pencil sketches and memory. This aspect of so-called fieldwork complicates our identification of plein-air paintings with confidence. Most if not all landscape painters sketched in pencil, oils, or watercolor out-of-doors to learn the varied aspects of nature. They then returned to their studios, where they developed compositions for easel paintings gleaned from their fieldwork, often experimenting with ideas by painting studio sketches. These intermediate sketches often served as the basis for an easel painting. Studio sketches, when identified by where they were made as opposed to

their function in the artist's working method, encompassed these after-the-fact field sketches as well as preliminary studies for paintings.

The distinction critics drew between a landscape painter's fieldwork and studio sketches assumed that fieldwork was objective reportage, free from invention. It was an attitude stemming from the general nineteenth-century fascination with science and natural history. This emphasis on scientific accuracy was often at odds with the making of art. Artists, writers, and journal editors wrote letters, diaries, essays, and articles about science and its influence on every aspect of the natural world. The early surveys of the American West piqued this interest, and the accompanying artists' field notes and sketches reinforced the idea that sketching in the field was an endeavor linked to collecting scientific specimens. As a result, much discussion of an artist's painted sketches focused on their presumed plein-air execution. However, if the viewer could not discern the difference between a sketch painted out-of-doors and one painted in the studio, the artist certainly was not going to call attention to the mistake.

Why so much concern over where a sketch was painted? The fundament of landscape painting was the direct experience of nature. The artist's travels were well documented in the press, and his arrival home after a summer in the field was a noteworthy event. Real and perceived hazards encountered in the field, including unpredictable weather, hostile Indians, and biting insects, gave the landscape painter's life a romantic aura. Those artists who ventured west or into other remote regions of the globe were described in glowing terms as explorers and pioneers. Sketches made in the field were trophies of their travels, proof of hazards overcome and wonders witnessed. As such, the sketches were understood to be truthful renderings of actual scenery, a benchmark of veracity for the artist's easel paintings, rather than small works of art in which the artist was already making decisions and alterations.

Landscape painting attracted this type of criticism owing to its growing importance as a genre defining American art. In 1835 Thomas Cole, then the leading practitioner of landscape painting in America, delivered a lecture titled "Essay on American Scenery," in which he declared:

American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and the future. . . . in looking over

the yet uncultivated scene, the mind's eye may see far into futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and poets yet unborn shall sanctify the soil.⁸

The ability to find virtue in both developed and undeveloped land and to take pride in America's unique geologic features gave specific shape to the new nation's sense of self. It has facilitated a love affair with the wilderness still apparent in today's society, and for Cole's generation this ability helped align the seminal importance of landscape painting with the mandate of the new nation. In Cole's hands Archibald Alison's theory of associationism, grounded in a synthesis of nostalgic association and intellectual reflection, became an oracle suitable for divining America's future.⁹ By midcentury this expectation was firmly inculcated in cultural thought, and one reviewer opined that the rise of landscape painting represented no less than "the accession of a new dynasty—the landscape art of the present day, the progress and development of which form an era in the history of our times."¹⁰ Writers and artists expanded the myth of the American wilderness as both a national and a spiritual icon.¹¹ In the words of William Gilpin, "To master the *geographical portrait* of our continent . . . is necessary to every American citizen—as necessary, as it is to understand the radical principles of the Federal government over it, and of political society . . . the American Republic is then predestined to expand and fit itself to the continent."¹²

Landscape painting thus provides a particularly rich matrix in which to understand the development of the oil sketch as an independent work of art. Pleinairists received constant encouragement from the press, which tended toward such enthusiastic pronouncements as

the true artist . . . will risk body and brains in the pursuit of a good sketch. Many are the adventures some of our successful painters tell in connection with their pictures. . . . This pride of profession is a noble sentiment, when . . . it impels him to study in field and wood, on sea and land, wherever a new thought is to be gleaned, a new feature of Nature to be caught; and he may be regarded as the truest art-devotee who studies Nature most. Our painters

are realizing this more and more: and, when the *stampede* to the country for study is made one of the *requisites* of his profession, then we shall see an American School of Art assuming a clearly defined shape.¹³

By 1858, when this was written, the author simply assumed that landscape would be the genre of an American school of art, and that plein-air sketches would be the foundation of that genre. It was clear by this time that landscape painting was a successful vehicle for conveying what was unique about the actual land, and by extension what was emblematic of America and its citizens. That vision was obviously subject to interpretation that varied across a broad spectrum of opinions; however, the common denominator was the locus of inspiration for the landscape painter, the direct experience of nature.

As a result, critics who often asserted their own opinions of how a landscape painter should paint nagged incessantly for artists to restrict themselves to painting sketches in the field, in front of the actual tree, rock, or larger vista. The writers for the *Crayon* led the charge, abetted by columnists writing for the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* and their sister publications. They counseled that the landscape artist needed to learn enough natural history to distinguish between gneiss and schist in his rocks, between oaks and lindens in his trees. Yet the quantity of unsolicited advice points to a deeper concern than that of scientific accuracy in a landscape painting. Science, with its emphasis on facts, appeared to be the new component of that elusive standard, "truth." As a writer for the *Crayon* noted, "The object of all real art, as of all science, is to elicit TRUTH."¹⁴

Truth in art has been as difficult to define as the term *sketch* or the concept of *finish*. Critics and artists bandied around the terms until their precise meanings were muddled so completely as to become useless as a means of clarifying a position. *True* and *false*; *sketch* and *study*; and *finish* and *completion* were contrasting terms that met in a murky middle ground so chewed up from verbal battles over their meaning that everything was covered with the mud of confusion and partisan politics.

This was not unusual in American critical writing on the arts; for the most part American critics adapted Continental and British art theory to suit their own

notions of aesthetic propriety. As a result, while the theoretical language crossed the Atlantic, the specific meaning of each concept was more often than not left behind. American art theory was a pastiche of semantic reasoning, apparently designed to provide the critic with the moral authority to pass judgment on art and to inject into the making of American art a code of conduct patriotic in nature and uplifting in spirit. Given the interpretation of the American landscape as a moral signifier of American cultural values and national progress, critics continually nudged the landscape painters toward a vision of "truth" that was predicated on direct observation and recording of specific aspects of nature, "truth" that could by extension be identified in the artists' easel paintings.

The trickiest aspect of defining *truth* as an element of art is the rather obvious contradiction in terms it presents. That which is art is by definition fiction; however, the insistence on identifying a core characteristic of truthfulness remained a component of art criticism throughout the nineteenth century. Even so, the meaning of the concept "truth to nature" shifted along the way to suit the prevailing aesthetic needs.¹⁵ The English artist and critic John Ruskin initially advocated "simple bona fide imitation of nature . . . selecting nothing, rejecting nothing . . . rejoicing always in the truth."¹⁶ Cole, by contrast, believed truth resided in the artist's intercession in the landscape, providing it with allusive meaning. The artist was enjoined to select and reject aspects of nature so that he could choose those forms that conveyed a particular point.¹⁷ Whittredge pointed out that as a result of Ruskin's popularity,

the study of nature proved to be too strong meat for all the babes to digest. They never got beyond a literal transcript. Ruskin, in his "Modern Painters" just out then and in every painter's hand, had told these tyros nothing could be too literal in the way of studies, and the consequence was that many of them made carefully painted studies of the most commonplace subjects without the slightest choice or *invention* and exhibited them as pictures. It did not require a very shrewd critic to overhaul such work as this.¹⁸

Due in large part to the *Crayon*, Ruskin was the most influential force in American landscape aesthetics during the late 1850s,¹⁹ and his philosophy remained in favor

well past the midcentury mark, finally giving way to views expressed by American proponents of Barbizon ideals during the 1870s. These acolytes, by contrast, would seek truth in the impact of a scene rather than in its trappings, looking for emotional significance in light and tone over purely representational subject matter. However, between 1830 and 1880 the prevailing interpretation of this mutable quality lay in a more direct representation of nature, as a manifestation of the relationship between art and science posited during the Enlightenment.²⁰

Descriptions of "truth" in landscape painting frequently mentioned the accurate rendering of specific forms and the faithful articulation of specific sites. This concern for fidelity to nature, bound up in the search for truth, carried moral overtones stretching far beyond the visual replication of place and elements. Plein-air painting was tied to the concept of spiritual uplift associated with the actual landscape, an aspect of deism derived as much from Emerson as from Ruskin. If, as Ruskin preached, an artist could apprehend God in nature through close observation, then working directly in nature sent a clear message about the artist's underlying mission. Durand adapted this in his second letter on landscape painting, reminding his readers that nature was "fraught with lessons of high and holy meaning, only surpassed by the light of Revelation." Going to nature and studying its forms was a spiritual exercise, investing drawing and sketching from nature—and by extension, landscape painting—with a moral as well as a cultural prerogative.²¹

However, scientific progress, notably in the arena of natural history, recast "truth" in terms of evidence. Accurate draftsmanship therefore was a critical element of this work, and the time spent learning and recording different types of trees, rocks, and other landscape features complemented the concurrent fascination with scientific exploration epitomized in the work of artist-explorers like John James Audubon and Titian Ramsay Peale II. Classification of new species in the New World lent authenticity to the process of exploration. Truth, as found in studies from nature, was inextricably linked with science. Foremost among the advocates of this approach was the eminent German naturalist Baron Alexander von Humboldt, who called for an artist who would use science in the pursuit of high art. Humboldt's influence on American landscape painting was

pervasive. In 1847 a writer for the *Literary World* summed up his philosophy:

Everything in nature is becoming subservient to the laws of science; and the landscape painter will be required to give his landscapes a Geological and Botanical character; he must so represent nature that the quality of earth may be recognized—the classes of cloud formation—of rock—of anatomy and drapery of trees, shrubs, and plants. The man who fails to impart individual character to all of these will be thought uneducated in his art.²²

This was not a passing fancy in the critical reception of landscape painting. Twenty years later Henry Tucker-man employed virtually the same yardstick in summing up Church's success in this very endeavor. In Tucker-man's influential view, it was precisely the marriage of science and wisdom, articulated by Humboldt among others, that yielded the "truth" found in Church's best pictures.²³

Discussion concerning truth, finish, sketching, and studying from nature was especially heated during the *Crayon's* first year, and each issue included some commentary on the correct means of learning to paint. In a column titled "The Artist's Standard," the unnamed writer noted, "No man has a right to love the sensual before the intellectual, or the intellectual before the moral. He has no right to make the execution the standard of excellence in Art, because it is of no importance considered without reference to an end."²⁴ How different the currency of debate some twenty-five years later, when George Inness would proclaim, "A work of art does not appeal to the intellect. It does not appeal to the moral sense. Its aim is not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion."²⁵

This shift in aesthetic standards reveals how the painted sketch became a work of art. More than trophies of places attained, these plein-air and studio sketches are the accumulated wisdom of each artist as he sought his own voice. In them lie the kernel of what moved the artist to pack up the most expensive and unwieldy tools from his studio and carry them across mountains and oceans from one end of the world to the other, often for months at a time. Here, in the sketches, the artist played, practiced, failed, triumphed, and ultimately set his course for each of his public statements in paint. As sketches attained greater public visibility, process became less a matter of "mysterious alchemists, hidden

from the sight of men, . . . [who] change earth and canvas to gold,"²⁶ and more a means of our understanding the individual paths taken by each artist toward the development of a mature style. Yet ultimately the appeal of the oil sketch was its individuality, not its placement in the process of making another work of art. The oil sketch chronicles what the artist does when the public is not looking. As such it is a forum for innovation, a departure from public obligation. Painted sketches became works of art when artists, critics, and patrons alike judged them on their inherent aesthetic merits. Learning primarily from written theory and reproductions of paintings, American artists had to make their own sense of the ongoing discussion of sketch and finish. From an occasional practice designed to help the landscape painter compose an easel painting, oil sketching became a significant form of artistic production in its own right. As a result, in the hands of American artists the painted sketch not only would play a critical role in the development of studio canvases, it would establish a separate niche having nothing to do with competitions and student exercises, emerging by the end of the nineteenth century as an independent work of art.

NOTES

1. See Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *Close Observation: Selected Oil Sketches by Frederic E. Church* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978); and Elaine Evans Dee, *Frederic E. Church: Under Changing Skies. Oil Sketches and Drawings from the Collection of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Museum of Design, Smithsonian Institution* (Philadelphia: Arthur Ross Gallery at the University of Pennsylvania, 1992).
2. See Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990).
3. For an exhaustive analysis of French academic painting practice, see Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). For comparative definitions of sketching terms, see esp. 80–81.
4. As late as 1864 John Gadsby Chapman underscored the extent of confusion over the meaning of the terms *sketch* and *study*, making it the subject of one of the chapters in *Chapman's American Drawing-Book: A Manual for the Amateur*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. J. Widdleton, Publisher, 1864).
5. "Review of *The American Drawing-Book: A Manual for the Amateur*, 3rd ed. by J. G. Chapman, N.A.," *Crayon* 1, no. 8 (21 February 1855): 122.
6. Asher B. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter III," *Crayon* 1, no. 4 (24 January 1855): 66–67.
7. James Fenimore Cooper, "American and European Scenery Compared," in *The Home Book of the Picturesque: or, American Scenery, Art, and Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852), 52, 54.
8. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," reprinted in John McCoubrey, ed., *American Art, 1700–1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 108–9.
9. The Scottish writer Archibald Alison developed his theory of associationism in his *Essay on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, published in England in 1790; the first American edition appeared in 1812. Associationism was predicated on the belief that objects could inspire the viewer's imagination and memory by recalling past experiences with similar scenes or things. Associationism as an aesthetic theory was grounded in the distillation of the experience of nature as a means of achieving elevated taste. His book was widely read on both sides of the Atlantic. See also Earl A. Powell III, "Thomas Cole and the American Landscape Tradition: Associationism," *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 8 (April 1978): 113–17.
10. Hugh Davids, *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 2 (1868): 57.
11. Comparing the European and American landscape, one reviewer noted the difference was that "One is man's nature the other—GOD's"; "The Fine Arts, Exhibition at the National Academy," *Literary World* 15 (15 May 1847): 348.
12. William Gilpin, *The Central Gold Region: The Grain, Pastoral, and Gold Regions of North America* (Philadelphia, 1860), 177, 182; quoted in David Huntington, "Frederic Church's *Niagara*: Nature and the Nation's Type," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 124. This William Gilpin (as distinguished from the 18th-century English artist and writer) was an American. Named first territorial governor of Colorado in 1861, Gilpin extolled the West as the "Great American Garden," giving inspirational speeches promoting colonization of the territory. For his influence, see Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), esp. 235–40.
13. "Our Artists and Their Whereabouts," *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 2 (September 1858): 209.
14. *Crayon* 5, no. 9 (September 1858): 258.
15. Most of the art-related periodicals of the day ran numerous articles wrestling with this issue; see esp. "On the Appreciation of Truth in Art," *Crayon* 2, no. 23 (5 December 1855): 387–88.
16. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London, 1843), 416–17.
17. As Cole noted in his journal entry for 27 November 1842, "All nature is not true"; quoted in Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliot S. Vesell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 335–36.
18. Worthington Whittredge, "The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge, 1820–1910," ed. John I. H. Baur, *Brooklyn Museum Journal* 1 (1942): 55.
19. William James Stillman was a staunch advocate of the Pre-Raphaelites and of Ruskin; he and John Durand were co-editors of the *Crayon*. Acknowledging this debt, Ruskin wrote to Stillman and Durand, "I have much to thank America for—heartier appreciation and a better understanding of what I am and mean, than I have ever met [*sic*] in England." Ruskin to the editors, *Crayon* 1, no. 18 (2 May 1855): 283.
20. John Constable, like his American contemporaries, considered his interests in geology, botany, color, and optics as part of his craft, not ancillary to it. "Painting is a science, and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature. Why, then, may not landscape be considered a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments." John Constable, *John Constable's Discourses*, ed. R. B. Beckett (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1970), 69.
21. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter II," *Crayon* 1, no. 2 (10 January 1855): 34–35. Durand also addressed this point in his first letter, in which he defined "the simple truths of Nature, which constitute the true Religion of Art." "Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter I," *Crayon* 1, no. 1 (3 January 1855): 2.
22. "The Fine Arts," *Literary World* (3 April 1847): 208; quoted in Franklin Kelly, "Frederic Church in the Tropics," *Arts in Virginia* 27, nos. 1–3 (1987): 21.
23. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1867).
24. "The Artist's Standard," *Crayon* 1, no. 22 (30 May 1855): 337.
25. George Inness, "A Painter on Painting," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56 (February 1878): 458–59.
26. "Studios of American Artists," *Home Journal* (26 January 1856).



The Artist in the Field

Artists are now scattered, like leaves or thistle blossoms, over the whole face of the country, in pursuit of their annual study of nature and necessary recreation. Some have gone far toward the North Pole, to invade the haunts of the iceberg with their inquisitive and unsparing eyes—some have gone to the far West, where Nature plays with the illimitable and grand—some have gone tropically mad, and are pursuing “a sketch” up and down the Cordilleras, through Central America and down the Andes. If such is the spirit and persistency of American Art, we may well promise ourselves good things in the future.¹

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when landscape painting became the dominant genre in America, artists took their paints and brushes into the field. They did so for numerous reasons, chief among them the opportunity to capture the fleeting color effects in nature in the same medium they used in the studio. The logistics of painting *en plein air* made that task more difficult than is readily apparent. Oil paints were and are cumbersome to carry, dry slowly, and attract insects; still, for the artist plein-air oil sketches provided invaluable observations of the features of the landscape. For the critic they served as proof of an artist's dedication to his craft and a benchmark for the veracity of an artist's easel paintings. To the patron, oil sketches offered a preview of those easel paintings and an opportunity to commission a work based on them. In sum, as landscape flourished as a genre in the decades between 1830 and 1880, plein-air oil sketches formed the fundament of the artists' technique.

Embarking on a sketching trip, a landscape painter had to carry all his equipment, either on his back or packed as part of his baggage (cat. 18). The minimal requirements for outdoor sketching were pencil and paper, often a small bound sketchbook that could be tucked into a pocket. The more ambitious task of painting

in oils *en plein air* required considerably more equipment: a camp stool and folding easel, sometimes fabricated as a single, collapsible structure;² a white sketch umbrella to filter the sunlight;³ pasteboards or prepared paper for oil paints or watercolors; a sketch box with prepared palette; paints; and the means to store and transport finished, wet sketches.

The most important piece of equipment in the artist's arsenal was his sketch box (cat. 4). This versatile tool was both storage chamber and auxiliary easel: paper could be pinned to the inside of the lid, and the open box was braced on the artist's knees while he worked (fig. 1). A wooden palette, complete with a day's prepared colors, could be attached inside with enough clearance to remain fixed in transit without making contact with the rest of the contents of the box. Grooves in the deep lid of the sketch box could accommodate several wet sketches, with enough space between them for air to circulate and to prevent wet sketches from sticking together.⁴ Finally, the interior of the sketch box had room for all these supplies plus extra paint and brushes.⁵ Sketch boxes were manufactured in various standard sizes, as was artist's board, variously known as academy board, pasteboard, paperboard, or mill board. In any of its incarnations, artist's board was constituted of a thin particle board, faced on one side with prepared paper.⁶ Artist's board could be precut to fit the artist's sketch box, which may explain why there are instances where the majority of an artist's oil sketches tend to be roughly the same size.

Transport of the paint itself, described by Sir Lawrence Gowing as "the oleous paste in its sticky inconvenience,"⁷ presented its own problems. Far from the nearest artists' colorman, the artist afield had to carry with him supplies enough to sustain him on the trip, whether he intended to be out for a weekend or several months. During the 1830s Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand had to cope with small pigskin bladders of prepared paint, tied shut and placed in hollowed-out areas inside their sketch boxes.⁸ Pigskin bladders by nature were messy and had an unpleasant tendency to burst during transit. The artist had to puncture the bladder to extract the paint, which left the remainder prone to drying out. As a result, colormen routinely prepared paints with a drying retardant.⁹ Slower-drying paints might have been advantageous to the colorman, who was concerned with his inventory drying out on his shelves, but resulted in slower-drying sketches in the

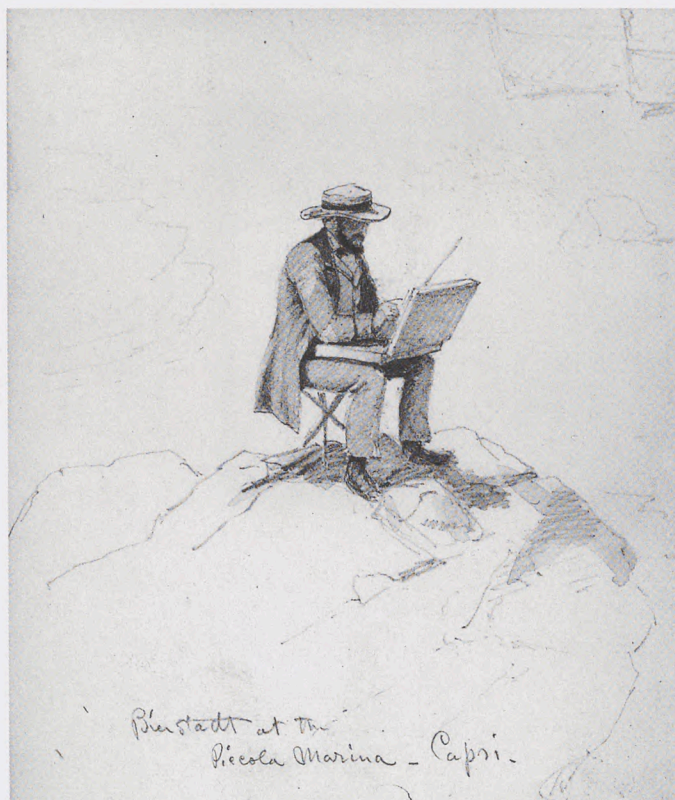


FIG. 1 Sanford Robinson Gifford, "Bierstadt at the Piccola Marina, Capri," from *Italian Sketchbook*, June 1857. Pencil and pen and ink on paper, 4 × 6¼ in. Private collection

field. Many artists compensated by carrying with them a copal drier, which they mixed with the paint as they used it, to speed the drying process.¹⁰ Little wonder some artists preferred to take dry pigments into the field and mix only what they needed.¹¹

Despite the inconveniences associated with plein-air oil sketching, Albert Bierstadt and his generation of artists did benefit from the one significant technological development. By 1842 Winsor & Newton introduced paints in a collapsible tin tube with a screw-top lid; shortly thereafter, tube paints became available through colormen in the United States.¹² Tube paints lasted longer and were far easier to manage out-of-doors than either bladders or dry pigments. However, even tube paints were not foolproof, as Sanford Robinson Gifford discovered in 1868 high in the Alps:

On opening my sketchbox, which had not been opened since I left Chamounix, a sight met my eyes which would have turned my stomach, if, fortunately, it had not already been turned. The box was broken, tubes burst, and a most horrible mixture of black, yellow, white, red, blue, and brown smeared

all the interior. At first it seemed an irreparable disaster, but when I cleared away the wreck it turned out not so bad as it seemed. Two hours patient work restored the box to working order—with the loss only of a few tubes of color, and of confidence in the future of my box.¹³

Such sketching equipment was not light in weight. Gifford reckoned that his haversack and sketch umbrella weighed twenty-six pounds.¹⁴ Bierstadt and the writer Fitz Hugh Ludlow discovered how cumbersome the artist's field equipment was when they set out for Oregon in 1863 and were faced with carrying everything on their horses. Ludlow described Bierstadt's color box as "heavy as a small valise." It had to be carried braced on the pommel of the saddle, and the pair was confined to moving at a walk as the box could not sustain rough going. Ludlow offered a "deep conviction that the man who first called chrome and white-lead *light* colors must have been indulging in the subtle [*sic*] irony of a diseased mind."¹⁵

An artist setting up camp for days or even weeks in the same spot had the luxury of allowing his work to dry before packing it up for the return trip. Rapid travel, especially as part of a larger group, required considerable ingenuity to overcome the problem of transporting wet sketches. Frederic Edwin Church had sketches stick together when they were stacked for packing before having dried completely. The result was a solid block of sketches cemented together as the paint dried. A group of Church's sketches from Germany have areas of lifted paint or small pieces of another sketch's backing board stuck to the painted surface, and many of the larger sketches bear the imprint of the edges of smaller sketches stacked on top before the painted surface was completely dry (see fig. 88). This was not an uncommon occurrence for an artist working in the field, or while traveling.¹⁶

Gifford experienced a devastating loss while traveling in Europe. The wet, cold winter of 1856 that he spent in Paris likely prevented many of his oil sketches from drying completely before they were packed for shipment to Rome. When Gifford opened the trunk, he discovered, to his horror, that his winter's work was ruined: the sketches had stuck together. Although this had happened to him previously in England, when two sketches from consecutive days stuck, then the artist had been able to separate the works and perform the necessary repairs. The months in transit, however,

effected irreparable damage, and Gifford had to face his loss.¹⁷ The artist, who habitually wrote detailed accounts of his day's activities, ceased writing for three months after opening his trunk. His uncharacteristic silence was a measure of his distress, as was his brief, matter-of-fact allusion to the tragedy in his first letter after the long silence (see cats. 51–53).¹⁸

Bierstadt developed an innovative solution to this problem, using "a tin cannister with closely arranged slots into which the oil sketches on very thin cardboard-like material could be inserted for drying."¹⁹ Once closed, this canister would be left in the sun, where it functioned like an oven, accelerating the drying process and perhaps obviating the need for a commercial drier added to his paints.²⁰ Dry sketches could then be stacked for transport without fear of their sticking together or smearing. On long forays in the field, such innovation made an unwieldy process manageable.

The need for making sketches that dried quickly rested on two experiences common to fieldwork: the need to pack up and move shortly after completing a sketch; and the desire to prevent damage to its wet, and therefore fragile, surface. Insects, leaf matter, other windborne debris, and fingerprints often mark the surface of plein-air paintings as additional trophies from the field. Nearly every artist who painted out-of-doors wrote about being accosted by swarms of insects, a particularly obnoxious form of artistic torture. Winged insects tormented and stung their stationary targets, often ending up stuck in the wet paint, to which they had been attracted by the aromatic fumes. In 1850 Church described his experience in the White Mountains with mosquitoes and black flies:

We were each of us surrounded by a cloud of them; so that, though we muffled up our faces with handkerchiefs, and kept a bunch of shrubs actively playing about our heads, yet we suffered indescribably from their attacks. This is a very serious obstacle to sketching in the open air: we have found it so, particularly here; and as for confining both hands, as the use of oils would do, it is out of the question, unless you wish to be devoured by these remorseless little winged blood-suckers.²¹

Church gave voice to a persistent problem facing artists painting outdoors during the summer months—a condition that no doubt plagued many would-be pleinairists, from Maine to the Hudson River, and



FIG. 2 Titian Ramsay Peale II, sketch of the artist at work, ca. 1823. Graphite on paper in a bound sketchbook, page $4\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{16}$ in. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Ramsay MacMullen, M.A.H. 1967, 1991.84.5

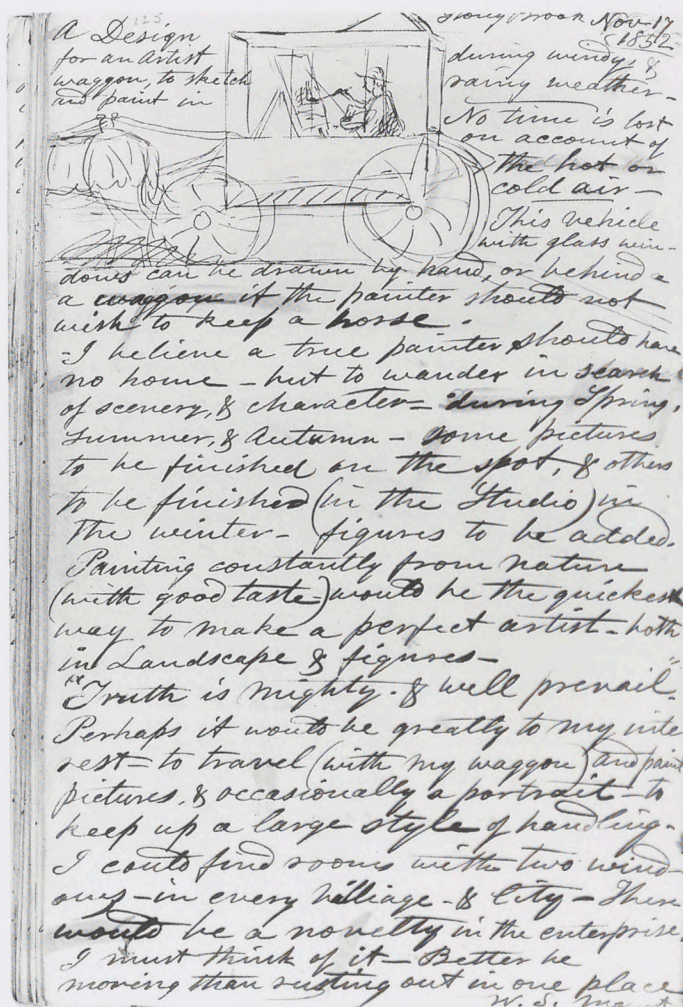


FIG. 3 William Sidney Mount, diary page for 17 November 1852. Ink on paper, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ in. The Museums at Stony Brook, Bequest of Ward Melville, 1977

certainly into South America. Titian Ramsay Peale II devised an ingenious solution to this problem while traveling with Major Stephen Long to the Rocky Mountains in 1819–20. On a page in his sketchbook he made a schematic drawing of himself at work (fig. 2), seated on a camp stool that was outfitted with a canopy draped with mosquito netting that protected both artist and easel.²² William Sidney Mount devised a different solution to the problems of variable weather and determined insects. In 1861 he commissioned a portable sketching studio from Effingham Tuthill that included plate-glass windows and a stove.²³ In his diary nine years earlier, Mount had sketched his horse-drawn carriage (fig. 3), along with the following description:

during windy & rainy weather—No time is lost on account of the hot or cold air—This vehicle with glass windows can be drawn by hand, or behind a waggon . . . a true painter should have no home—but to wander in search of scenery & character—during Spring, Summer, & Autumn—some pictures to be finished on the spot, & others to be finished (in the studio) in the winter—figures to be added. Painting constantly from nature (with good taste) would be the quickest way to make a perfect artist—both in Landscape & figures . . . Better be moving than rusting out in one place[.] W. S. Mount[.]²⁴

An artist traveling alone could set his own timetable; as part of a larger group, his ability to sketch rapidly and effectively became an important component of his success. However, someone watching an artist at work who was intent on his task had a very different sense of

time. Ludlow's account of Bierstadt's working method on the frontier paraphrased the description provided by William Newton Byers, who led the artist on a side trip to Idaho Springs, Colorado, in June 1863 and watched as

[Bierstadt] said nothing, but his face was a picture of intense life and excitement. Taking in the view for a moment, he slid off his mule, glancing quickly to see where the jack was that carried his paint outfit, walked sideways to it and began fumbling at the lash ropes, all the time keeping his eyes on the scene up at the valley. . . . As he went to work he said "I must get a study in colors: it will take me fifteen minutes!"²⁵

Fifteen minutes turned into forty-five, but the retelling of the story frequently ended with Bierstadt's overoptimistic pronouncement. A second companion on that trip, the Colorado artist Henry A. Elkins, remembered Bierstadt's saying,

"Wait twenty minutes while I sketch this storm." They waited, but twenty minutes flew by, and he was still at work. Thirty, forty, and fifty minutes, and then an hour was gone, and the artist, absorbed in his work, was earnestly engaged in transferring the natural sublimity before him to paper. At the end of an hour and a half the artist completed his sketch from which the painting [*Storm in the Rocky Mountains* {Brooklyn Museum of Art}] was made.²⁶

Stories of Bierstadt's working method, popularized by Byers and Ludlow, appeared in notices about Bierstadt's major paintings. In the case of *Mount Hood* (Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe), it was claimed that the artist's recording "every detail of so wide a view in time-sketches, each limited to twenty minutes, and each noting the time of day, and consequent relative position of the sun, is one of the secrets of M. Bierstadt's success."²⁷ He also developed a reputation early in his career as a prolific artist in the field, evidenced by the weight of his accumulated materials. In addition to the many published reports of Bierstadt's output, in 1867 the artist's wife wrote in a letter, "Albert is perched nearby on his sketching stool making an oil study of the Jungfrau. He has almost 50 splendid studies."²⁸ Inspiration did tend to encourage rapid and prolific sketching, and Church described himself "sketching furiously" for "12 to 15 hours daily" at Königssee in 1868 (see cat. 42), a level of productivity unusual even for him.²⁹

By the middle of the nineteenth century, spending the summer months in the field had become the accepted practice for landscape painters. Scheduled to take advantage of better weather, these summer forays provided artists with welcome relief from New York City's sweltering heat and access to the wilderness vistas that had become the staple of their genre. Contemporary periodicals and newspapers chronicled artists' adventures and itineraries, whetting the appetites of readers for a glimpse of the contents of those bulging portfolios with which the artists would return in the fall. Their destinations were both familiar and exotic, often calling attention to natural features that then became favorite sites for tourists.³⁰ For the artist afield for the summer, improved access to areas including the Catskills, the White Mountains, and the Maine coast made trips there comfortable and productive. Artists choosing more remote destinations, such as the American West, South America, and Europe, planned longer trips, often lasting several months to a year or more.

Public interest in the whereabouts of America's landscape painters and in their field sketches developed in part thanks to the attention paid to Cole early in his career. In 1825 Cole made his first plein-air sketching trip to the Catskills. The three paintings resulting from that foray, purchased by John Trumbull, Durand, and William Dunlap, inspired hopes for a genre dedicated to landscape painting in America. Cole was hailed by Dunlap in 1834 as the first American artist to work directly from nature, and he wrote, in doing so, Cole "had found the right path, and . . . had found the true mode of pursuing it."³¹ Such accolades effectively laid the groundwork for the standards by which all American landscape painting would be judged for decades to come. Those standards centered on the value of direct observation and the willingness to undertake the travel necessary to witness nature's wonders. Cole had impressed on his colleagues the need to see at firsthand the scenery they proposed to paint, and in the process confirmed that the landscape painter required stamina, fortitude, and a willingness to endure hazards of weather and terrain to accomplish his mission. Over twenty years later, the critic Henry Tuckerman echoed this sentiment, commenting: "In this, as in so many other instances, a true direction and development in landscape art was gained away from the studio, by the personal and independent study of Nature herself."³²

Cole and Durand viewed nature as the landscape

painter's answer to the formal art training offered in European painting academies and ateliers. By studying nature's features, the landscape painter acquired the knowledge and skill necessary to paint landscapes that were both accurate and inspired. The European system did not teach plein-air painting as part of the standard academic curriculum. Landscape painting out-of-doors was more properly taught only to advanced students capable of sorting through the varied stimuli of nature to draw or paint anything of value. The same was true of the curriculum at the National Academy of Design in New York, with its emphasis on drawing from casts and studying the old masters. For American artists seeking instruction overseas, the language barrier prevented much formal study. Instead, they copied paintings in museums, observed other artists at work—primarily in the field—and tended to study together. Most Americans taught themselves to paint by watching other artists and reading books on art and the natural sciences.

The varied study of nature supplanted the lessons traditionally ascribed to painting academies in Europe and provided a valuable education in natural history. Unburdened by academic strictures and even the best-intended collegial advice, the landscape painter afield made his own decisions, and his own mistakes. The difficulty in obtaining plein-air landscape sketches differed measurably from the method of studio-bound artists concentrating on other genres, such as portraits, still lifes, and genre scenes. Part of the appeal inherent in such oil sketches was the association of their execution with the hazards of travel. By and large, discussion of the dangers faced by the landscape painter was modeled after the Byronic ideal of risking one's life in pursuit of higher inspiration in art. The landscape painter inherited the mantle of the artist-explorer from tales told of Claude-Joseph Vernet and J. M. W. Turner lashed to the masts of sailing ships to experience the gales they would then translate into paint.³³ Courage in the face of such natural obstacles only underscored the tenets of the American character, whether the scene depicted was American or not. Sketches from the field became trophies of hazards overcome as well as augurs of future greatness.³⁴

Although Cole inspired many of his colleagues to take up plein-air painting, he remained ambivalent about its usefulness throughout his career. Cole came of age under the influence of the late-eighteenth-century aesthetic preference for idealized, synthetic landscapes

rather than topographically accurate "views."³⁵ As a result, he never acknowledged the act of sketching as anything more than a tool put to use in the service of a more significant studio painting. From England in 1829 he had argued,

I think there is in Alison's work on taste a passage in which he attributes the decline of the fine arts to the circumstance of painters having forsaken the main object of art for the study of its technicalities. The means seem a greater object of admiration than the end,—the language of art, rather than the thoughts which are to be expressed. . . . The language of art should have the subserviency of a vehicle. It is not art itself. Chiaroscuro, colour, form, should always be subservient to the subject, and never be raised to the dignity of an end.³⁶

Dunlap's description of Cole's working directly from nature implied that the artist was working in oils as well as in pencil, as his knapsack contained "his paints, a cumbrous stone *muller* and brushes of various kinds."³⁷ However, in 1835 Cole eloquently explained his diffidence about open-air work to his Baltimore patron Robert Gilmore:

I think that a vivid picture of any object in the mind's eye is worth a hundred finished sketches made on the spot—which are never more than half true—for the glare of light destroys the true effect of colour & the tones of Nature are too refined to be obtained without repeated painting & glazings. And by my method I learn better what Nature *is* & painting *ought to be*—get the philosophy of Nature & Art—whereas a finished sketch may be done without obtaining either one or the other—and it is in great measure a mere mechanical operation.³⁸

Cole's ambition, to create a "higher style of landscape," was based on the idea that nature provided the necessary raw material for the artist, who returned to his studio to effect the alchemical transformation of such base material into painterly gold. The artist's tools, including sketching, were simply means to that end.³⁹

Cole's conclusions likely stemmed from his own preference for working in pencil. Pragmatically, working in pencil was far easier, being cleaner and more portable than the apparatus required for on-site oil sketching. Cole often numbered his margin notes to correspond with specific features in the landscape, in which he iden-



FIG. 5 Thomas Cole,
*View from Mount Holyoke,
Northampton, Massachusetts,
after a Thunderstorm (The
Oxbow)*, 1836. Oil on canvas,
51½ × 76 in. The Metropoli-
tan Museum of Art, Gift of
Mrs. Russell Sage, 1908.
(08.228)



FIG. 6 Detail of fig. 5

brilliant piece of personal and artistic marketing: Cole's audience could assume that this was his usual way of working in the field, and that plein-air painting in nature was the foundation of his technique.

Cole may have been an intermittent pleinairist, but he was a gifted teacher of plein-air painting. When Durand turned from painting portraits to landscapes he sought out Cole as his teacher and from him learned the tools and techniques of painting out-of-doors. In late June 1837 he and Cole embarked on a sketching trip that would have a profound effect on the course of American landscape painting.⁴¹ In preparation for their trip to Schroon Mountain, Cole instructed Durand on the materials he would need to purchase to paint outdoors:

You said you wished me to give you a list of colors I scarcely know what can be got in bladders, but I think the following. White. Roman Ocher, Lena Siena Raw & Burnt, Burnt Umber, Chrome Yellow, Naples Yellow, Antwerp Blue, Madder Lake, Vandyke brown, Light Red, Indian Red, A little Cil, & some Copal varnish in a vial as a drier. Vermillion & even Crome Yellow we may carry unprepared and a little Untroman [illegible {ultramarine?}]. Camp Stool I think you ought to have. Camp Umbrella if you can get one I will join you in it if you like. It will be well to get two sets of colours one for you & one for me of course the bladders must be small the white the greatest quantity.⁴²

Durand's somewhat hesitant reply stands in marked contrast to the specificity of Cole's advice:

I am a little at a loss to judge the quantity of colour necessary it appears to me for most of it we shall want more than what they call "small bladders" which you know come at 8 cents each. of cours[e]—they must be small—the next size is usually at 25 cts each would that be too much? . . . Dechaux is going to get made an umbrella for me, there being none already. I hope he will succeed. He has the camp stool with easel [sic] attached that will do. I think you said half a dozen pasteboards for each of us would be the thing. by the by you have not mentioned yellow ochre in your list and will we not want some mummy or bone brown or Asphaltum?⁴³

The equipment Cole and Durand discussed as items necessary for their trip to Schroon would vary little in the decades to come. The remarkable aspect of this trip

is that an artist who felt ambivalent about the usefulness of plein-air painting would be willing to teach it, and in doing so could inspire Durand to adopt it as his favored means of working. Indeed, Cole's tutelage set up Durand as the principal exponent of plein-air painting in America.

The widespread acceptance and expectation of plein-air painting as an elemental tool for the landscape painter is evident in Frederic Edwin Church's earliest correspondence with his new mentor. The eighteen-year-old Church equated his imminent apprenticeship with Cole with an exercise in plein-air painting, and in a letter to Cole he wrote: "[I have] prepared my color and painting utensils, so that I could now immediately set out for Catskill. . . . I have never before this spring attempted to paint from nature, but of all employments (as far as I have had experience) I think that the most delightful."⁴⁴ Church's two-year apprenticeship afforded Cole plenty of opportunity to express his thoughts on the practice of plein-air painting. Between June 1844 and the fall of 1846 Church accompanied Cole on sketching trips around the Catskill region. For the first year, Cole curbed Church's desire to paint *en plein air*, directing his pupil toward a program of extensive drawing out-of-doors. As he had with Durand before him, Cole stressed solid draftsmanship and an acute eye for recording color and atmosphere using richly descriptive written language, a gloss often found in the margins of these drawings. The memoranda appended to so many of Church's pencil drawings provide the most extensive commentary on the artist's way of seeing and transcribing the world around him. His lifelong predilection for labeling and describing parts of his drawings, using an evocative sensory and color vocabulary, is a legacy of this two-year period.

Cole's forays in plein-air oil sketching were infrequent, and when he did paint out-of-doors it was more often to capture a general view and not one relating to a specific easel painting. His *Catskill Meadow* (fig. 7) is a case in point, in which the artist rapidly and surely brushed in the topography, paying particular attention to the stand of trees in the left foreground and the gently undulating contours of the meadow. The forms are broadly realized and the horse added for scale and incidental interest. The extensive wet-on-wet paint and the summary handling of this work suggest the swift execution required by on-site painting, hastened by transient light effects and variable weather. There is little specific



FIG. 7 Thomas Cole,
Catskill Meadow, ca. 1830s.
Oil on canvas, $5\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ in.

articulation of the landscape elements; Cole would have had a hard time employing this sketch in any useful manner in his studio.

By contrast, one of Church's early plein-air panoramas, *Hudson River Valley Landscape with Winding Stream* (fig. 8), also defines a landscape of near and middle distance. However, while Cole's *Catskill Meadow* provides rough contours and a sense of the terrain, Church's novice work demonstrates his greater assurance in working outdoors. Church has painted a complex, undulating foreground, its topography demarcated by the varied

plants growing along the winding stream. Even at this early stage in his career, Church's eye for detail transcended Cole's entire approach to painting out-of-doors. Where Cole brushed in broad swaths of turf, punctuated by calligraphic stands of trees, Church articulated middle and remote distance using directional brushwork to sculpt the contours of specific fields and hills.

In the decade following Cole's death, the pendulum swung firmly away from the high-minded allegories he so cherished toward more scientifically rationalized views of actual and invented spaces. It did not take long



FIG. 8 Frederic Edwin Church, *Hudson River Valley Landscape with Winding Stream*, late 1844. Oil on light brown cardboard, $12\frac{1}{4} \times 16\frac{1}{8}$ in. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1981.27A

before Cole was viewed as a conservative proponent of studio facture in an era that increasingly valued directly painted impressions from nature. Despite the evidence to be found in *The Oxbow*, Cole's philosophy as expressed to Gilmor apparently contributed to the misperception that he never essayed sketches in oil out-of-doors. By 1855 written accounts of Durand's life expressed the belief that he, not Cole, was the first American to paint out-of-doors.⁴⁵ In one of the first issues of the *Crayon*, a column titled "Studying from Nature" included the following passage:

The majority of English landscapists who paint in oil, however, make careful studies in the same material.—and, indeed, in many cases, paint their pictures, if of small size, entirely on the spot. . . . our own Cole painted, we believe, from pencil outlines simply; but this is a dangerous course for a young artist . . . Durand makes his studies entirely in oil, finishing carefully, but generally of parts only.⁴⁶

Durand's considerable debt to Cole for his encouragement and tutelage went virtually unacknowledged. Even Durand's own account of his progress as a landscape painter, summarized in his published letters on landscape painting, made no mention of Cole's influence.⁴⁷

Indeed it was Durand who popularized and codified the art of painting out-of-doors for American landscapists. Beginning in 1842, he spent from two to four months of every year traveling through the eastern United States amassing pencil drawings and oil sketches for use in his larger paintings. He was often accompanied by other artists, in particular by John Casilear and John Frederick Kensett.⁴⁸

For instance, in the summer of 1849 Kensett accompanied Durand and Casilear on a sketching trip to Tannersville, near Catskill.⁴⁹ Toward the end of that summer season, Kensett wrote to his sister that "the region hereabouts is rich in cascades, waterfalls, rocks, trees, etc. & within convenient distance of our temporary mountain abode—no slight recommendation—besides, we can leave our [implements] under the shelter of the rocks without the fear of their being disturbed.—thus saving on the fatigue of carrying heavy boxes to and fro."⁵⁰ During that summer and the next, Durand also faithfully recorded his progress in letters to his son. "The weather is so fine that I am unwilling to quit without one more study which if obtained will make six, as the fifth will be finished tomorrow." And again: "I have finished two

studies and commenced a third, one of them pretty good for me."⁵¹ His early letters convey a sense of struggle and triumph in his laboring over the studies, underscoring the difficulties inherent in the successful manipulation of oil paints in the field (see cats. 11, 12).⁵²

John Durand recalled his father's setting his palette before embarking with his camp stool and easel to a favorite haunt, where he would spend anywhere from two days to four weeks at work on a series of small canvases. Most artists used plein-air oils to record weather phenomena or botanical and geological features that would be recast in an indoor studio after the journey was over, and often far from the original source of inspiration. By contrast, Durand returned with fully fledged, small paintings executed rapidly, but with an eye toward finish. These Durand called his "studies from nature." Influenced by William Wordsworth and Ruskin, Durand turned to painting rocks and foreground studies during the 1840s and 1850s in a carefully meticulous manner. His oil sketches from these decades are much tighter than the fluid, plein-air sketches of trees painted in Hoboken in 1837 (cat. 8), works whose technique had been directly influenced by Cole.

Although painted *en plein air*, these were essentially finished canvases painted outdoors. They did not replace his more ambitious efforts, many of which Durand composed using specific trees adapted from his painted studies. In *Landscape with a Beech Tree* from 1844 (fig. 9), Durand allows his brush to remain fluid and loose as he defines both the tree trunks and their foliage; the compositional balance is far less important than the careful articulation of individual forms. Most significant about this particular work is the role it played in his monumental canvas of the following year, *The Beeches* (fig. 10), in which the two trees and tree stump at left are drawn directly from the oil sketch.⁵³ In addition, the twinned trunks to the right of center in the sketch recur along the left margin of the painting, behind the main tree trunks. Durand's composition frames a bucolic pastorate in which a shepherd makes his way with his sheep toward a distant lake. In this painting Durand combined the influences of Claude and John Constable, fusing direct observation with an idealized treatment of form and atmosphere to create an arcadian American landscape. Durand would employ his plein-air studies from nature in this manner throughout his career, refining his brushwork and adding a narrative gloss to the finished work.



FIG. 9 Asher B. Durand, *Landscape with a Beech Tree*, 1844. Oil on canvas, $15\frac{1}{4} \times 20\frac{1}{4}$ in. © Collection of The New-York Historical Society, 1932.16

Durand's preeminence as an exponent of plein-air painting derived in part from the advice he dispensed in his nine "Letters on Landscape Painting" published in the *Crayon* during 1855. His columns presented a synthesis of methodology derived from Cole, Constable, and Ruskin and were the natural culmination of his artistic influence. Although nominally aimed at younger, untrained artists, his advice permeated discussion of proper painting practice. In his second letter Durand advocated solid draftsmanship as the fundament of landscape painting: "Take pencil and paper, not the palette and brushes, and draw with scrupulous fidelity the outlines or contour of such objects as you shall select. . . . slovenly and imperfect drawing finds but a miserable compensation in the palpable efforts to disguise and atone for it, by the blandishments of color and effect."⁵⁴ Calling this the "first rudiment of Art," Durand counseled young landscapists to refrain from plein-air painting until they mastered the pencil. At that point Durand promoted "the importance of painting direct from Nature."⁵⁵ His third letter continued to stress that this technique should be perfected in the service of art, not as an end in itself: "Waste not your time, therefore, on *broad sketches* in color; such can only be useful to the mature artist, as suggestive rather than representative."⁵⁶ Rather, Durand espoused making closely observed painted studies of the landscape and its components—rocks, trees, and foreground plants—as a prelude to painting finished landscapes.



FIG. 10 Asher B. Durand, *The Beeches*, 1845. Oil on canvas, $60\frac{3}{4} \times 48\frac{1}{8}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Maria DeWitt Jesup, from the collection of her husband, Morris K. Jesup, 1915. (15.30.59)

During the second half of the century, numerous landscape painters traveled in the company of naturalists and scientists, "the artists with their camp-stools, and color-boxes, the sages with their goggles, nets, botany-boxes, and bug-holders, the gentlemen of elegant leisure with their naked eyes and a fish-rod or a gun."⁵⁷ Western exploration and settlement was a particular form of Enlightenment legacy, as explorers and artists blazed a trail into the unknown interior of the continent. These surveys often included a contingent of scientists, topographers, and artists. Most, therefore, constituted extended natural-history field trips for the artist, providing him with extensive information about the flora and fauna of a new region, as well as much-needed protection. The camaraderie among the travelers focused attention on the social aspects of the journey as much as on the stated artistic or scientific aims. Such mixed company also encouraged the belief that art and science were at one in the art of the landscape painter and that the artist's field studies carried the imprimatur of specimens collected along the way.

Recording the American landscape was certainly one of the purposes of surveying of the continent, beginning with Lewis and Clark, yet until the landscape genre was well established in the fine arts, the works by the artists who accompanied the earliest surveys made little impact on the perception of landscape painting. What did impress armchair travelers was the aura of danger associated with the trips. The Long Expedition of 1819–20, which explored the "Great American Desert," between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, set the early standard for fortitude and bravery in the field. On that trip, Titian Ramsay Peale II was among the small group of artist-naturalists who asserted control over the expedition after the military escort was recalled.⁵⁸ Their willingness to pursue artistic goals in spite of harsh conditions and at risk of personal safety made the more common perils of bursting paint bladders and biting insects seem tame.

Peale worked primarily in pencil and watercolor in the field; George Catlin, best remembered for his Indian Gallery, may well have been the first artist to venture west carrying oil paints. Needing to pack up and travel swiftly, beginning in 1830, Catlin packed a roll of canvas, cutting each length as he needed it and attaching it to a collapsible frame.⁵⁹ His exhilaration in this process prompted him to write: "I feel an unceasing excitement of a much higher order—the certainty that I am draw-

ing knowledge from the true source. . . . This feeling, together with the desire to study my art, independently of the embarrassments which the ridiculous fashions of civilized society have thrown in its way, has led me to the wilderness for a while, as the true school of the arts."⁶⁰

This emphasis on the landscape painter as artist-explorer highlights the point of confluence between landscape painting as a fine-art genre and scientific tool. An artist's participation on these surveys invested his fieldwork with the aura of scientific accuracy and implied the successful negotiation of hazardous terrain in his quest for artistic trophies. Not until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 was the artist-explorer in the West able to focus on the destination rather than on the journey. After that, rail travel eliminated the need to endure the physical hardships endemic to earlier overland journeys; the difficulties were quickly reduced to remnants of an era in which physical fortitude was an accepted measure of artistic ability.

Because landscape painting demanded physical endurance on the part of the artist to reach his subjects, fortitude was a significant aspect of the appeal of the genre. Although some landscape painters could afford to travel for much of their journeys by coach or train, many features were accessible only on foot or by animal transport. The sketches presented one account of their experiences; diaries and letters written by these artists paint their own picture of endurance and epiphany, making it clear that the hardships of the journey were easily compensated for by the beauty of the landscape. Artists were aware that the more remote the location and the more difficult the terrain, the more interest in the results there might be on the part of the public.

Fieldwork did not always mean travel into a wilderness. Most artists traveling in Europe followed established routes and relied on guidebooks for advice. This did not eliminate travel-related difficulties, especially those encountered at high altitude. Gifford's trip to England and Europe in 1855 provides a fascinating look at the artist's plein-air production. A quiet and thoughtful man, Gifford was also in fine physical shape for much of his life and set an exhausting pace for himself that few of his colleagues could match. On both of his two European trips he kept a daily journal in the form of letters to his father that encompassed both the grand scheme of his endeavors as well as such minutiae as what he ate for breakfast. His journal is an impressive

account of a man who epitomized the hardy nature of the landscape painter. The artist crisscrossed the Alps several times in 1855, negotiating the Simplon Pass to Domodóssola, a distance of forty-nine miles, on foot in thirteen hours.⁶¹ In an era before Gore-Tex and waffle-soled boots, he described his hike over the Saint Gotthard pass as "an easy walk of near 30 miles."⁶² This was not a branch of the fine arts for the fainthearted. Few artists could keep pace with Gifford, who was frequently up between 3 and 5 A.M., and the artist took note in his journal of the times he encountered his colleagues just starting out as he returned from a morning's hike.⁶³

Travel-related hazards made for good reading, and armchair voyagers reveled in accounts of the artists' adventures. For example, Bierstadt's plans to travel west with Colonel Frederick V. Lander in 1859 required obtaining permission from the War Office in Washington to accompany an official expedition. The fanfare accompanying the notices in his hometown New Bedford, Massachusetts, newspaper and in the *Crayon* underscored the anticipation felt in the East as one of the country's top landscape painters embarked into little-known territory.⁶⁴ Early reports of the western mountains and the California coast promised a terrain as remote and intrinsically exciting as Church's South America. Tuckerman confirmed the magnitude of Bierstadt's endeavor in his biography of the artist, proclaiming,

Adventure is an element in American artist-life which gives it singular zest and interest. From Audubon's lonely forest wanderings and vigils, to Church's pilgrimage among the Andes, or Bradford's chase after icebergs off the coast of Labrador, its record abounds with pioneer enterprise and hardy exploration. A few years ago the idea of a carefully studied, faithfully composed, and admirably executed landscape of Rocky Mountain scenery would have been deemed chimerical, involving, as it must, long and isolated journeys, and no ordinary risk and privation. . . . We look at the result, but scarcely realize the process.⁶⁵

Linking fieldwork to fortitude enhanced the landscape painter's stock in the art world and encouraged artists to find innovative ways to keep the public apprised of their exploits in the field. From his trip with the Lander survey Bierstadt wrote numerous letters, six of which were published that summer in the *Crayon*, *Harper's*, and

the *New Bedford Daily Standard*. His descriptions were intended to prepare his audience for the unfamiliar marvels he witnessed and sketched at firsthand. By commenting on the hardships and wonders encountered on his journey, Bierstadt also kept his name in the news despite his absence and created a climate favorable for the unveiling of his first western paintings after his return.

Travelogues in the form of letters from the field were an effective means of enhancing the drama of the artist's journey, and not surprisingly Bierstadt and Church worked with professional writers to chronicle their exploits. In his account of Bierstadt's second western trip in 1863, Fitz Hugh Ludlow focused on the artist's efforts to sketch live buffalo, noted for their bad tempers particularly when cornered or wounded. At one point the author retrieved Bierstadt from his labors to let the artist sketch a wounded buffalo bull held at bay by the wranglers. Ludlow's prose conveys the artist's excitement: "He leapt from the buggy; out came the materials of success following him, and in a trifle over three minutes from his first halt, the big blue umbrella was pointed and pitched, and he sat under it on his camp-stool, with his color-box on his knees, his brush and palette in hand, and a clean board pinned in the cover of his color-box."⁶⁶ While Ludlow and the others distracted the bull, Bierstadt painted his sketch, and "For nearly fifteen minutes, this process was continued, while the artist's hand and eye followed each other at the double-quick over the board. . . . As soon as he had transferred the splendid action of the buffalo to his study, he called on us to put an end to the distress, which, for aught else than art's sake, was terrible to see."⁶⁷

Such descriptions masked one of the underlying reasons for taking such risks: to learn unfamiliar forms. Bierstadt's sketches of buffalo provide ample evidence of his ability to learn this animal's complex structure. Beginning with awkwardly drawn profiles of buffalo in a sketchbook (Rutgers University Library Special Collections, New Brunswick, N.J.), Bierstadt drew the animal in pencil, gradually increasing his knowledge of its anatomy. The oil sketches demonstrate similar improvement, ranging from those in which it is apparent the artist is still attempting to grasp the fundamental anatomical structure of the beast to those in which he has mastered not only the form but the spirit of the animal as well (fig. 11). Here the artist has included as many different views as the paper permits, most of which are

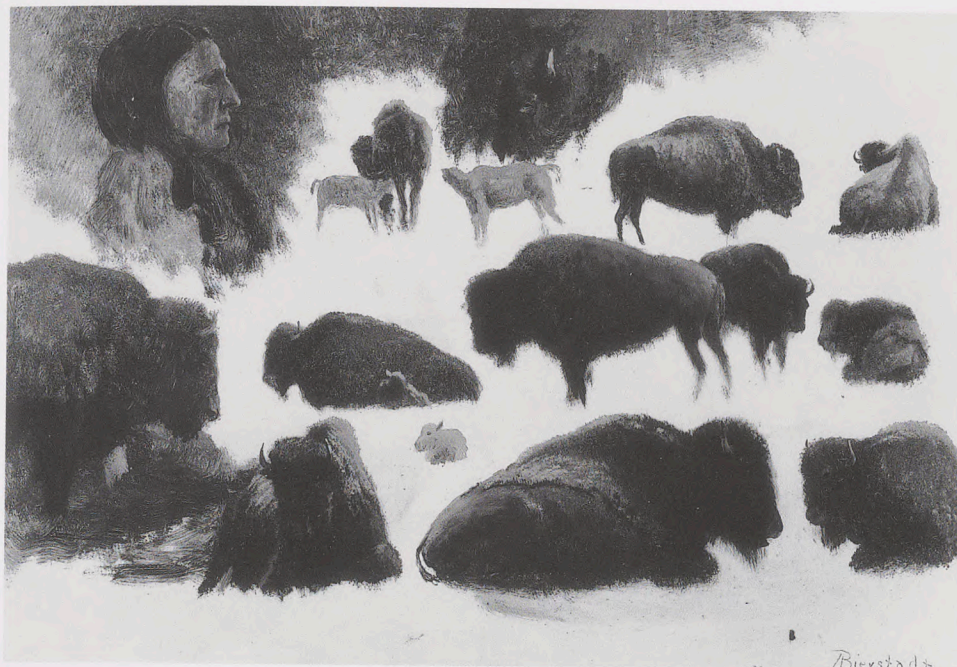


FIG. 11 Albert Bierstadt, *Studies of Bison*. Oil on paper, 14 × 19 in. From the Collection of Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, 0126.25

painted with minimal detail but with an assured understanding of the animals' anatomy. Bierstadt painted these buffalo standing and at rest, the scale at variance from one vignette to the next. By contrast, *Head of Buffalo and Indian* (fig. 12) presents a single animal. The buffalo's shaggy hump is ragged from shedding and matted with dirt from his wallows, details Bierstadt records with impressive precision.

Ludlow balanced his field rhetoric with an engagingly romantic description of Bierstadt's daily routine:

Sitting in their divine workshop, by a little after sunrise our artists began labor in that only method which can ever make a true painter or a living land-

scape, *color-studies* on the spot; and though I am not here to speak of their results, I will assert that during their seven weeks' camp in the Valley they learned more and gained greater material for future triumphs than they had gotten in all their lives before at the feet of the greatest masters.

More useful was Ludlow's description of their evening ritual: "when the artists returned, half an hour was passed in a 'private view' of their day's studies."⁶⁸ Bierstadt's painting *Cho-Looke, the Yosemite Falls*, depicting a camp at the base of the falls, an artist's color box and folded umbrella prominently displayed in the right foreground as twilight sets in (fig. 13), may commemo-

FIG. 12 Albert Bierstadt, *Head of Buffalo and Indian*, ca. 1863. Oil on paper, 13 7/8 × 19 in. Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles



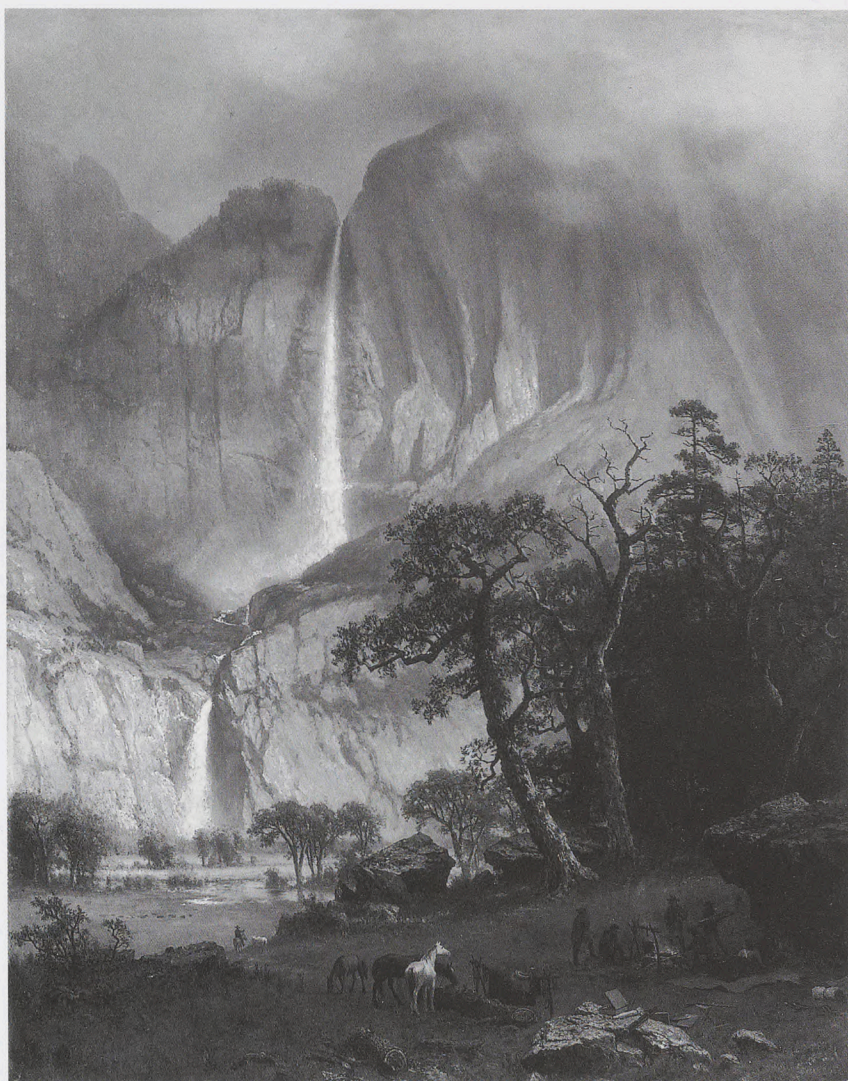


FIG. 13 Albert Bierstadt, *Cho-Looke, the Yosemite Falls*, 1864. Oil on canvas, $34\frac{1}{2} \times 27\frac{1}{8}$ in. The Putnam Foundation, Timken Museum of Art, San Diego

rate this event.⁶⁹ From this point in time, Bierstadt occasionally included a vignette of the artist at work in his landscapes, often seated with his sketch box on his lap (fig. 14). In doing so he also injected a narrative gloss usually omitted from plein-air paintings, in which the artist habitually concentrates on nature to the exclusion of human activity.

Artists who traveled overseas tended to mix sketches of nature with those depicting city life and man-made landmarks, yet there were hazards to be alert for there, as well. Of all of Church's far-flung destinations, Palestine may have presented the greatest real risk to his life. Anxious to get the most from his limited time there, but also mindful of the differences in customs regarding the making of images, Church kept a diary that formed the basis of his letters to two friends: the sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer and Church's patron William H. Osborn. In these writings Church recounted his gradual success in sketching in front of his Bedouin guides:

From all I could gather from books and from close inquiry at Beyrout [*sic*] and Jerusalem and from inquiry of the last person who had been there—I learned that the trip was to a certain extent one of risk. . . . That above all things no one is allowed to sketch alive there—Indeed some years ago an artist who ventured there was shot while attempting a sketch[.] These and other cheerful bits of information made a rather lugubrious look out for us.⁷⁰

Church journeyed to Petra on a camel, from which perch the artist soon learned to make hasty sketches in pencil—an exercise not dissimilar to sketching from a small boat.⁷¹ On one sheet Church paired sketches of these “ships of the desert” with a vignette of a sailing ship rolling on high seas (fig. 15), his wry sense of humor visualizing the metaphor with ease. He also described his varied techniques for sketching the scenery:

FIG. 14 Albert Bierstadt,
*The Artist Painting in
Yosemite*, ca. 1863. Oil on
board, 13½ × 19 in. Private
collection, Seattle



I flung open my sketchbook and drew the scene roughly we then dashed down the path and seized another view and so on sketching and running until we reached the narrow plain below . . . I had time to take some more careful sketches and at dusk I returned to camp with a goodly number . . . I made a more elaborate sketch by candlelight for the purpose of fixing these details now fresh in my memory. . . . I made a rapid oil sketch before and after breakfast[.]⁷²

One of the pencil sketches Church made that day was *Valley of Yemen, Palestine* (fig. 16), which bears a strong resemblance to the oil sketch *Mountain Stream, Yemen Valley, Palestine* (fig. 17). Both the drawing and the oil sketch bear the hallmarks of hasty execution, the drawing made on the spot as the artist worked to record the details of the landscape well enough to trust his memory for the rest. Its damaged edges and the initials and date painted in the foreground mark this work as a field sketch, rather than a more detailed work composed at leisure back in Beirut.

FIG. 15 Frederic Edwin Church,
*Camels and Riders:
Separate Study of Sailboat at
Sea*, 1868. Graphite on gray-
green paper, 9½ × 17½ in.
Cooper-Hewitt, National
Design Museum, Smith-
sonian Institution, New
York, Gift of Louis P.
Church, 1917-4-443





FIG. 16 Frederic Edwin Church, *Valley of Yemen, Palestine*, 20 February 1868. Graphite and white gouache on pale green-gray paper, $12\frac{1}{8} \times 17\frac{1}{2}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-376



FIG. 17 Frederic Edwin Church, *Mountain Stream, Yemen Valley, Palestine*, February 1868. Oil and graphite on thin paperboard, $12\frac{7}{8} \times 20$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-844

Church's diary and letters from this trip convey his excitement and delight with the scenery, and the tensions associated with sketching in front of his Bedouin guides. Fearful his escorts would not take kindly to being sketched, and that he would have no clear opportunity otherwise, he was, in his words, "determined to have something to take away."⁷³ One night, having observed his guides seated around a crackling fire with their camels, Church painted a small sketch from inside his tent, capturing both the exotic and the dangerous elements of his experiences (cat. 39). Sketches like these epitomize the romantic qualities associated with plein-air painting—the willingness to risk personal safety in pursuit of sketches powerful

enough to evoke the effect of that experience in retrospect, and from a safer distance.

The sense of triumph attached to successful sketching forays added exhilaration to the landscape painter's profession. Merging physical fortitude with artistic achievement enhanced the respect patrons and other viewers accorded the artist and the interest they evinced in his finished easel paintings. The plein-air sketch valorized the artist, sanctioning his views of nature and providing an index to the veracity of his work in the studio. This public admiration for the landscape painter's courage carried over to the artist's studio exploits, fostering an eagerness for accounts of his way of working there, too.

NOTES

1. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 3 (September 1859): 183.
2. Sketching easels were adjustable in height, measuring 30–36 inches long when closed and opening to a full height of 5–6 feet. One model combined easel and seat, described in 1849 as "the most convenient and pleasant apparatus for the Lady Sketcher." Rutherford J. Gettens and George L. Stout, *Painting Materials: A Short Encyclopedia* (New York: Dover, 1942; reprint, 1966), 310–11.
3. "This is a folding device. The canopy cloth is on a collapsible frame of small steel ribs, the stalk is in two or three parts, with removable joints. Such umbrellas have a diameter of about 3½ feet. The stalk is fitted with a steel spike at the end so that it can be set firmly in the ground." Ibid., 309. Artists discovered that without the mediating influence of a sketch umbrella, colors applied in full sun appeared far too dark when viewed in the indoor light of a studio.
4. This was not always successful. Sanford Robinson Gifford recounted, "my sketch of the morning and my previous evening sketch had got foul of each other in my box, not having been well fastened apart, and in their disarrangement had done each other considerable damage, which it took me the afternoon to repair." Gifford's journal, entry for 28 July, in his letter dated 2 August 1855. Gifford kept a daily journal on each of his European trips that he then sent to his father as a series of letters. A transcript of these letters is in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA), reel D21.
5. For a contemporary description of the landscape painter's plein-air apparatus, see "Foreign Correspondence, Items, etc.," *Crayon* 5, no. 10 (October 1858): 292.
6. Artist's board was introduced about the end of the eighteenth century in England and appears in the earliest sales lists for the firm C. Roberson and Company, Ltd. in 1819. Winsor & Newton listed mill board (as did the rival firm Reeves and Son, Ltd.) first in 1850; in America it was manufactured by A. C. Friedrichs Company of New York by 1868. Gettens and Stout, *Painting Materials*, 221.
7. Quoted by David Blayney Brown, *Oil Sketches from Nature: Turner and His Contemporaries* (London: Tate Gallery, 1991), 8.
8. In 1847 Worthington Whittredge embarked on a sketching trip to Kentucky carrying a "sketch box, a block of small canvases, a dozen bladders of colors [and] a folding campstool." Whittredge, "The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge, 1820–1910," ed. John I. H. Baur, *Brooklyn Museum Journal* 1 (1942): 15.
9. Sir Charles Lock Eastlake, *Methods and Materials of Painting of the Great Schools and Masters*, 2 vols. (New York, 1847; reprint, New York: Dover, 1960), 2:405.
10. Cole specified that Durand should purchase a copal drier to speed the drying of their oil paints. He also advised working with very thin paint out-of-doors. Cole to Durand, Catskill, 9 June 1837. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 6, New York Public Library (NYPL).
11. Cole traveled to Schroon with both dry pigments and bladders. Cole to Durand, Catskill, 14 June 1837. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 6, NYPL.
12. The American expatriate artist John Goffe Rand patented the collapsible paint tube in London by 1841 and sold the exclusive rights to Winsor & Newton, which marketed it as "Rand's Patent Collapsible Tube." Alexander W. Katlan, *American Artists' Materials Suppliers Directory: Nineteenth Century* (Park Ridge, N.J.: Noyes Press, 1987), 10–11.
13. Gifford's journal, entry for 14 July, in his letter dated 22 July 1868. Also cited in Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 115.
14. "In it [the haversack], I have three shirts, one pair of socks, sketch box and extra colors, writing portfolio, ink, two sketch books, one block for oil sketches, maps, Black's Tourist, two thin books for journal, notes and expenses, tobacco and pipe, a few cigars, and an extra haversack, matches, fish line and hooks, tooth brush, sewing apparatus, handkerchiefs, & a few other little things. I have only the grey woolen suit I stand in—no overcoat." Gifford estimated the haversack alone weighed 15 pounds. Gifford's journal, letter dated 9 July 1855. In a subsequent letter Gifford noted, "my knapsack, maud, umbrella case and contents, weighed 26 pounds; and to carry that 28 or 29 miles on a wet afternoon, with no rest but that which we had while we lunched at King's House, was quite as much as I cared to do." Gifford's journal, entry for 26 August, in his letter dated 28 August 1855. Whittredge recalled the lengths to which Gifford would go to travel light: "He never became deeply attached to the cumbersome sketch box with the accompanying stool which had to be carried with it for a seat, and when I showed him a contrivance for a seat with four legs instead of three, which I had invented and which stood firm, he looked at it and returned it to me at once." "Address by W. Whittredge," in The Century Association, *Gifford Memorial Meeting of the Century, Friday Evening, November 19th, 1880* (New York: The Century Association, 1880; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1974), 45.
15. Ludlow, "On Horseback into Oregon," *Atlantic Monthly* 14 (July 1864): 78, 80.
16. This kind of damage was not entirely restricted to the field. Depending on how the artist stored them after his return home, his sketches could sustain further damage stacked in a humid environment. See Gail Davidson's discussion of how Church's sketches were stored at Olana, especially after the artist's death, in "Eliot Clark and the American Drawings Collection at Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum," *Archives of American Art Journal* 34, no. 4 (1994): 6.
17. Gifford's memorial catalogue lists all of the paintings and oil sketches in his estate, and as such forms the most complete account of his oeuvre. This catalogue lists only 3 oil sketches for the entire time Gifford spent in France, as the bulk of them were damaged in transit to Italy. See The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *A Memorial Catalogue of the Paintings of Sanford Robinson Gifford, N.A.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1880; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1974), 3.

18. Gifford's journal, entry for 15 October 1856 and in his letter of the same date.

19. Dr. Franz and Mrs. Franz R. Stenzel, *An Art Perspective of the Historic Pacific Northwest* (Portland, Oreg.: Dr. and Mrs. Stenzel, in cooperation with the Montana Historical Society and Eastern Washington State Historical Society, 1963), 5. The authors surmise that this apparatus explains why many of Bierstadt's oil sketches measure 14 × 19 in., presumably having been cut to fit these drying racks. It appears more likely that Bierstadt had the drying rack made to fit his preferred support, as he had settled on this format years before his first trip west.

20. Ross Merrill, chief of conservation at the National Gallery of Art, noted in a conversation that for the modern sketcher the trunk of a car works on the same principle.

21. [F. E. Church], "Mountain Views and Coast Scenery, by a Landscape Painter," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* (November 1850): 129–31; also E. B. M., "Sketchings. Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 6, no. 9 (September 1859): 281–82, for a humorous description of such nuisances.

22. My thanks to Richard S. Field, curator of prints and drawings, Yale University Art Gallery, for bringing this sketch to my attention.

23. David Cassedy and Gail Schrott, *William Sidney Mount: Works in the Collection of the Museums at Stony Brook* (Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1983), 22, 30.

24. Mount's diary, entry for 17 November 1852. The Museums at Stony Brook, Bequest of Ward Melville, 1977. Reproduced in Cassedy and Schrott, *William Sidney Mount*, 21. Mount's wagon resembled the portable room of the English artist and author Philip Gilbert Hamerton, which is described at length in *A Painter's Camp in the Highlands, and Thoughts about Art* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1862).

25. William Newton Byers, "Bierstadt's Visit to Colorado," *Magazine of Western History* 11, no. 3 (January 1890): 237–38; quoted in Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1974), 124, 126. Ludlow mentions Byers and Bierstadt's trip in "Letters from Sundown—No. IV. The Artists' Western Expedition. The Colorado Gold Mines," *New York Evening Post*, 30 July 1863, 1.

26. "Bierstadt's Storm in the Rocky Mountains," *Georgetown (Colorado) Courier*, 17 July 1884, p. 3, col. 3.

27. "Minor Topics of the Month," *Art Journal* (London) 9 (1 January 1870): 29.

28. Transcribed in a letter from Rosalie Osborne Mayer (Bierstadt's niece) to Mrs. Ross E. Taggart, in the curatorial files of the paintings department, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

29. Church to William H. Osborn, Berchtesgaden, 29 July 1868. Typed transcript in Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, David C. Huntington Archives (Olana Archives).

30. Examples are the Catskills in New York, the White Mountains in New Hampshire, Mount Desert Island in Maine, and Yellowstone in Wyoming. In each case artists helped popularize specific sites and vistas, encouraging tourist traffic and the development of facilities for the traveler. See, for example, Kenneth Myers, *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820–1895* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987); John Wilmerding, *The Artist's Mount Desert: American Painters on the Maine Coast* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Nancy K. Anderson et al., *Thomas Moran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1997).

31. William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 3 vols. (New York, 1834; reprint, 1918), 3:146.

32. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1867), 388.

33. See George Levitine, "Vernet Tied to the Mast in a Storm: The Evolution of an Episode in Art-Historical Folklore," *Art Bulletin* 49, no. 2 (June 1967): 92–100, for a thorough analysis of this aspect of artistic fortitude and vision.

34. "I suppose Mr. Cropsey brought with him many trophies of his skill in sketches of Summer and Autumn scenes." Letter from Clara L. Wilde to the Cropseys, 25 January 1855. Photocopy of a transcript in the correspondence files of the Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

35. Critics disdainfully termed the transcription of nature as "view" painting, a term borrowed from a type of architectural perspective drawing. By the 1770s it was frequently used to describe the practice of making nonidealized, pastoral landscape paintings. Ian J. Lochhead, *The Spectator and the Landscape in the Art Criticism of Diderot and His Contemporaries* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 34; William S. Talbot, *Jasper F. Cropsey, 1823–1900* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, for the National Collection of Fine Arts, 1970), 18.

36. Cole to Gilmor, undated draft of a letter after 10 May 1835; quoted in *Annual II: Studies on Thomas Cole, an American Romanticist* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1967), 79.

37. Dunlap, *History of the Arts of Design*, 3:142. The reference to the stone implies Cole was grinding dry pigments to make his paints.

38. Cole to Gilmor, undated draft of a letter after 10 May 1835; quoted in *Annual II*, 79.

39. Thomas Cole, "Notes on Art" (12 December 1829); quoted in Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliot S. Vesell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 116. Ralph Miller has noted that this is a paraphrase of Alison's original text, which he quotes at length in his article, "Thomas Cole and Alison's Essay on Taste," *New York History* 37, no. 3 (1956): 287, 297–98 n. 14.

40. Cole to Gilmor, draft of letter in reply to a letter from Gilmor dated 10 May 1835; quoted in *Annual II*, 79. Here Cole advocates a method ascribed to Claude by Joachim von Sandrart, who wrote that Claude observed nature intently before returning to the studio to paint. Given Claude's stature as the preeminent landscape painter in the Western European tradition, it is not surprising that Cole would pattern his own activity after that of Claude. See Sir Lawrence Gowing's introduction to *Painting from Nature: The Tradition of Open-Air Oil Sketching from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981), 3.

41. Ten leaves from Durand's sketchbook from this trip survive, in the collection of the New-York Historical Society (1918.70, 1918.86–1918.94). The title sheet is dated in Durand's hand, *June 19th 1837 Procured this book*. See Richard J. Koke, comp., *American Landscape and Genre Paintings in the New-York Historical Society*, 3 vols. (Boston: New-York Historical Society, 1982), 1:306–7.

42. Cole to Durand, Catskill, 9 June 1837. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 6, NYPL.

43. Durand to Cole, New York, 13 June 1837. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 6, NYPL.

44. Church to Cole, Hartford, Conn., 20 May 1844. Thomas Cole Papers, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Services Division, Albany (NYSL). A small oil sketch of a fallen tree in a landscape, inscribed on the verso, *First original landscape by F. E. Church* (Olana State Historic Site, OL.1980.1890), may be this earliest plein-air effort, painted in anticipation of his apprenticeship. Within the stylized sweep of trunk and branch and the dark palette of this small, somewhat heavily handled work, one can discern Church's natural abilities both in composing the landscape and in establishing a potent mood. See Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1:34.

45. Durand was not the only artist who claimed the distinction of having worked out-of-doors first. In an undated diary entry William Sidney Mount, who had sketched in oils *en plein air* with Cole in 1843, wrote, "Of painting in the open air—I am the first American I know of that painted directly, that is, made studies in the open air with oil colors. An artist in painting a landscape in the open fields is animated by nature and can do more in the right spirit, in the same length of time, than he can possibly accomplish in his paint room from memory or from his sketches." Un-

dated MS at the Museums at Stony Brook; quoted in Cassedy and Schrott, *William Sidney Mount*, 22–23. They note that Mount later penciled the phrase “before he has much experience” after the end of the quoted passage. One could speculate the addition was made after Mount had read Durand’s “Letters on Landscape Painting.”

46. “Studying from Nature,” *Crayon* 1, no. 23 (6 June 1855): 353. Daniel Huntington’s memorial address for Asher Durand reiterated that Cole “rarely, if at all, . . . painted his studies in the open air,” and that Durand’s practice of plein-air painting “proved a contagious influence, since followed by most of our artists.” *Asher B. Durand, a Memorial Address by Daniel Huntington* (New York: The Century Association, 1887).

47. In his first letter on landscape painting Durand wrote that he had never worked under the “eye and direct instructions” of a more experienced artist, omitting any mention of his sketching experiences and correspondence with Cole. “Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter I,” *Crayon* 1, no. 1 (3 January 1855): 2. Although Durand never studied formally with Cole (as did Church), this omission is curious given the strength of Durand’s friendship with Cole.

48. See David Lawall’s chronology of Durand’s life in *A. B. Durand* (Montclair, N.J.: Montclair Art Museum, 1971), 24–29.

49. Kensett made sketching tours July through October every year between 1841 and 1872, with the apparent exception of 1860, when he was in Washington, D.C. John Driscoll, “From Burin to Brush,” in John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* (New York: Worcester Art Museum, in association with W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 91–93.

50. Kensett to his sister, Sarah Kensett, 23 September 1849. AAA, reel N68–84.

51. Asher B. Durand to John Durand, Tannersville, 28 September 1849. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 9, NYPL; and Asher B. Durand to John Durand, Tannersville, 18 September 1850. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 4, folder 8, NYPL.

52. David Lawall notes that by the mid-1850s, this emphasis has disappeared from Durand’s correspondence, apparently indicating that the artist was becoming more skilled. Lawall, *Asher Brown Durand: His Art and Art Theory in Relation to His Times*, 4 vols., Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1966 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 1:353, 657.

53. See David B. Lawall, *Asher B. Durand: Documentary Catalogue of the Narrative and Landscape Paintings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 348–49; and Barbara Dayer Gallati, entry on *The Beeches*, in John K. Howat et al., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 104–6, for extensive discussion of this pair of pictures.

54. Asher B. Durand, “Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter II,” *Crayon* 1, no. 2 (10 January 1855): 34–35.

55. Durand, “Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter I,” *Crayon* 1, no. 1 (3 January 1855): 1–2.

56. Durand, “Letters on Landscape Painting. Letter III,” *Crayon* 1, no. 4 (24 January 1855): 66–67.

57. Fitz Hugh Ludlow, “Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite,” *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (June 1864): 749.

58. In April 1820 Secretary of War John C. Calhoun ordered his troops not to go past Council Bluffs, Iowa. The Army obeyed, and Major Long’s scientific party proceeded without an escort via an overland route to the Rocky Mountains. Stephen Harriman Long, *From Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains: Major Stephen Long’s Expedition, 1819–1820*, ed. Maxine Benson (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum, 1988), vii.

59. J. Gray Sweeney, “The Artist-Explorers of the American West, 1860–1880” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1975), 79, 81.

60. George Catlin, letter from the “Mouth of Yellow Stone, Upper Missouri, 1832,” quoted in John McCoubrey, ed., *American Art, 1700–1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 94.

61. Gifford’s journal, letter dated 3 September 1855. See also “S. R. Gifford,” *Harper’s Weekly* 11 (13 July 1867): 434. Gifford mentions walking

24 miles from Chamonix to Martigny via the Forclaz Pass in his entry for 14 July 1856, in his letter dated 28 July; and records another 24-mile-long walk from Ragaz across the Col de la Foppa to Reichen in his entry for 6 August, in his letter dated 10 August 1856.

62. Gifford’s journal entry for 12 August 1856, in his letter dated 24 August 1856.

63. See Gifford’s entries for 22 and 23 August, in his letter dated 24 August 1856.

64. “Messrs. Bierstadt and Frost have just set out for a sketching tour among the Rocky Mountains. They intend to join Colonel Lander’s wagon train at St. Louis, and will probably be gone eight or ten months.” Notice dated Boston, 15 April 1859, *Crayon* 6, no. 5 (May 1859): 161–62.

65. Henry Tuckerman, “Albert Bierstadt,” *Galaxy* 1 (15 August 1866): 679–80; reprinted in Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 389.

66. Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent: A Record of Travel across the Plains and in Oregon, with an Examination of the American Principle* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 67.

67. Ludlow, *Heart of the Continent*, 68–69.

68. Ludlow, “Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite,” 749–50; also Ludlow, *Heart of the Continent*, 434.

69. For an extensive discussion of Bierstadt in Yosemite, see Nancy K. Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt: Cho-looke, the Yosemite Fall* (San Diego, Calif.: Timken Art Gallery, 1986), unpaginated.

70. Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, Jaffa, Palestine, 10 March 1868. Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, Special Collections, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art, N.Y. (Albany Institute).

71. Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, Jaffa, Palestine, 10 March 1868; Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, Albany Institute. Also cited in Frederic E. Church, *Petra diary*, 1868, 23. Olana Archives.

72. Church, *Petra diary*, 1868, 38–40. Olana Archives.

73. Church to Palmer, 10 March 1868. Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, Albany Institute.



The Alchemy of the Studio

If the field was where an artist went to gather information and practice his craft, the studio was where he translated that vision of nature into his finished paintings.

Whether returning from the wilderness or a European tour, artists counted on their accumulated sketches to inspire compositions for their easel paintings. The individual paths taken on that journey from sketch to finished painting varied widely as each artist developed his mature style. At home, painting in the studio remained an essentially private act; some artists went so far as to lock their doors to discourage interruption. What they did behind those closed doors was often described by reviewers as alchemy, in this case the transmutation of raw nature into artistic gold.

Field sketches were the basis for a synthetic composition, and what mattered most was the seamlessness of that synthesis. The effectiveness of the finished painting was judged by its ability to convey the general “truth” of a place. Thomas Cole preferred to experience nature firsthand, making drawings in pencil often annotated with copious notes. When he returned to his studio, he was armed with ideas and reference material and, perhaps most important, a new set of sensations from which to draw inspiration. His way of working was designed to help him achieve his personal artistic goal, the construction of a “higher style” of landscape, in which literal truth was in the details and moral (or “ideal”) truth—his ultimate agenda—in the composition. Cole’s approach to painting embodied the traditional European technique he described to Robert Gilmore as a process in which

the most lovely and perfect parts of Nature may be brought together, and combined in a whole, that shall surpass in beauty and effect any picture painted from a single view. I believe with you, that it is of the greatest importance for a painter always to have his mind upon nature, as the star by which he is to steer



FIG. 18 Thomas Cole,
Study for "Desolation," 1836.
Oil on panel, 10 × 16 in.
Private collection



FIG. 19 Thomas Cole,
Desolation, from *The Course
of Empire*, 1836. Oil on canvas,
39¼ × 63¼ in. © Collection of The New-York
Historical Society, 1858.5

to excellence in his art. He who would paint compositions, and not be false, must sit down amidst his sketches, and combine them, and so have nature for every object that he paints.¹

The artist's preference for painting compositions as opposed to "views" of recognizable landmarks mirrored the European distinction between these two branches of landscape. As a result, Cole's studio sketches tended to be small preliminary oils in which he mapped out the compositional structure and palette for an easel painting (see cats. 6, 7). It was a frugal, practical method that enabled him to experiment with the intellectual and psychological parameters of his message. For each of his paintings in the series *The Voyage of Life*, *The Course of Empire*, and *The Cross and the World*, work began with a concept described in one of his sketchbooks, followed at some distance by a small preliminary study on canvas or panel that allowed Cole to balance mood, color, compositional structure, and message before he turned to the larger canvases awaiting his touch (figs. 18, 19).²

Cole's desire to elevate the message conveyed by American landscape painting governed his choice of working method. However, for artists of Frederic Edwin Church's generation, including the older Asher B. Durand, plein-air work would serve as a standard by which to judge the merits of finished canvases. The act of painting in the field developed into a barometer for measuring the seriousness of the artist's endeavors and his commitment to embodying the principle of "truth" in his studio work. As such, plein-air painting attracted disproportionate attention as a practice and certainly critics assumed it to be both necessary and useful to the landscape painter. Yet conditions in the field did not always lend themselves to plein-air work in oils. The close correspondence between a significant number of Church's pencil drawings and oil sketches of the same subjects suggests that when the need arose he worked first in pencil, reserving oil sketching for more controlled conditions.

Church's first trip to South America in 1853 provides a case in point. The rapid pace of his first look at

this region undoubtedly contributed to the dearth of oil sketches datable to this trip, but their relatively small number also suggests that Church had not yet found a satisfactory method of coping with the humid, insect-plagued environment.³ A swiftly sketched pencil drawing, inscribed *Cayambe near Quito / Aug 29-53 / Cayambe* (fig. 20), hints at some of the geologic features of that volcano's cone, its summit shrouded in clouds. Clearly the rapid strokes conveyed enough information for Church to reconstruct the scene in oil, perhaps as early as later that evening.⁴ In the related oil sketch (fig. 21), he successfully captured the same ravines and slopes that are seen in the drawing, expanding the view to situate the cone in a hilly landscape populated by a single thatched hut in the right foreground. In this work Church achieved a remarkable economy of means. Each brushstroke not only conveys color but sculpts the bar-

ren hills, suggests the rushing stream, delineates the foreground vegetation. The lone human is tiny, yet well defined. The overwhelming effect is one of grandeur and monumental scale, the composition fully resolved and ripe for further articulation in a more ambitious work. For Church, sketches painted in oils supplemented works in pencil, the two techniques practiced in tandem if not always together in the field.

In more detailed drawings like *Tequendama Falls near Bogotá, Colombia* (fig. 22) Church deftly sketched palm fronds and mossy rocks with rapid yet sure strokes of the pencil, accenting the forms with the now-familiar legend of abbreviations and numerical shorthand, their exactitude providing a kind of compensation for the missing oil colors.⁵ The intervening time between the artist's on-site pencil drawing and subsequent oil sketch might be as little as a few hours or as much as a few

FIG. 20 Frederic Edwin Church, *Mount Cayambe, Ecuador, 29 August 1853*. Graphite on cream paper, 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-772A

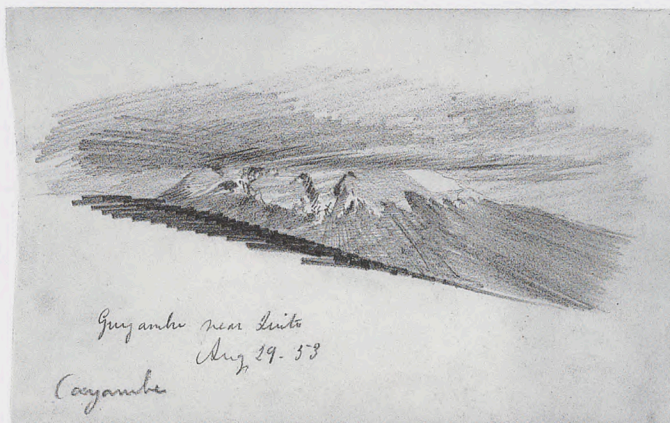


FIG. 21 Frederic Edwin Church, *Cayambe, ca. 1853*. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1981.22A





FIG. 22 Frederic Edwin Church, *Tequendama Falls near Bogotá, Colombia*, July 1853. Graphite and white gouache on thin buff paper, 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-260

months. Thus the line between true plein-air work conducted in front of the scene depicted and after-the-fact field sketches painted in hotels or camps later in the course of a trip is blurred. That so many of Church's oil sketches appear to have been executed *sur le motif* is a tribute both to his ability to capture what changed so rapidly before him and to recall colors and effects of light well enough to give them the immediacy and veracity assumed to be solely the province of true plein-air execution.

Artists did not distinguish between sketches made *en plein air* and those painted on rainy days or further along on a trip. It was of little consequence to them where the bulk of their sketches had been made; what mattered was the caliber of the material they brought back to their studios. However, the extensive commentary in drawing manuals, essays, articles, and editorials

on the proper practice of landscape painting devoted to plein-air practice tended to stigmatize the landscape painter who did not make many sketches in the field, or who appeared to have begun the process of inventing his forms without consulting nature directly. In 1855 the *Crayon* announced:

[T]he true method of study is to take small portions of scenes, and there to explore perfectly . . . every object presented, and to define them with the carefulness of a topographer. . . . Young artists should never *sketch* but always *study*, and especially never make studio sketches.⁶

As defined by the writer for the *Crayon*, *studio sketches* were anathema to the landscape painter, as they implied that the artist had circumvented the direct study of nature, relying instead on invented forms as the basis of his paintings. These "studio sketches" were not the preliminary studies an artist like Cole painted when he established a composition for an easel painting, but sketches painted indoors *in lieu of* plein-air work—in other words, pure invention of nature's forms as the basis of an equally invented landscape painting. The underlying arguments returned to the issue of truth—specifically the observer's need to believe that a landscape painter's finished paintings were based primarily on direct observation.

Sensitive to this issue, Church wrote to an admirer, "I have never been in the habit of making studio sketches—which accounts for the dearth of 'bits'—in my portfolio."⁷ The term *bit* was widely used in the art world to describe small vignettes or fragments artists usually painted as souvenirs for friends, family, and studio visitors, as opposed to sketches they created for a more serious artistic purpose. Coined as a mild pejorative, "bits" described a type of studio sketch relegated to a low rung on the hierarchy of artistic production.

The desire to qualify where a sketch was made appears to have been the dubious legacy of early artist-explorers and interpreters of John Ruskin's "truth to nature" dictum. The association of scientific accuracy with sketches made by artists accompanying the surveys of the American interior rubbed off on landscape painting, especially after such recognized fine artists as Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran joined them. Fieldwork was thereby linked to scientific observation despite the logical and inevitable blending of objective reportage with artistic interpretation of nature. Science

was not the only culprit. Ruskin's writings, with their religious undertones, tended to get twisted to mean that any deviation from the literal and topographic delineation of nature was a deviation from "truth." In weak moments even Durand succumbed to this thinking. In his first "Letter on Landscape Painting," he reminded his colleagues, "True Art teaches the use of the embellishments which Nature herself furnishes, it never creates them," and warned, "never . . . profane her [Nature's] sacredness by a wilful departure from truth."⁸ Whether impelled by science or faith, artists were encouraged to view plein-air painting as a benchmark of "truth," an extremely subjective yet pervasive criterion for judging landscape painting, one that helped create and enforce the distinction between sketches painted in the field and those made in the studio.

Matters only became more tangled as critics and reviewers attempted to make qualitative judgments about an artist's technique. Field sketches and studio sketches could be virtually indistinguishable to the casual viewer. Most observers who wrote about the merits of plein-air painting drew distinctions based on a sketch's appearance rather than any solid information about its site of execution; they assumed plein-air facture in the absence of contradicting fact.

The amount of ink spilled and time spent in the construction of theoretical guidelines for landscape painters did not measurably alter the pragmatic fact that each artist developed a working method—in the field and in the studio—that benefited him, regardless of the balance between indoor and outdoor work. During his lifetime Cole did not encounter as much active discussion of appropriate methods for the landscape painter, primarily because he was in the process of setting those standards. After his death, and especially after the *Crayon's* publication of Durand's "Letters on Landscape Painting," Cole's comments about the personal value of plein-air painting were held up as a glaring weakness in his method. For a generation that would place added value on veracity, Cole's preference for invented landscapes would also be viewed as a deviation from the kind of "truth" observers sought in the works of Church, Bierstadt, and their colleagues.

While an artist was out in the field, outsiders could only surmise how he spent his time and what he would bring back in the fall. After returning to his city studio, theoretically the artist was more accessible, yet in fact he was often working behind a locked door. This fluctu-

ating state of inaccessibility created a climate in which gossip flourished regarding what an artist was working on. Just as the writers for contemporary periodicals and newspapers had followed the artists' exploits in the field, now they speculated as to what subject each artist would present as the result of his winter's work. Lengthy descriptions of the idiosyncrasies of how an artist worked were a popular feature in the press. George W. Sheldon penned this description of Sanford Robinson Gifford's approach to beginning a painting:

All that he asks for is a favorable day on which to begin. To Mr. Gifford, this first day is the great day. He waits for it; he prepares for it. He wishes to be in the best possible physical condition. He is careful about his food; he is careful to husband his resources. When the day comes, he begins work just after sunrise, and continues until just before sunset. Ten, eleven, twelve consecutive hours, according to the season of the year, are occupied in the first great effort to put the scene on canvas. He feels fresh and eager. His studio door is locked. Nothing is allowed to interrupt him. His luncheon, taken in his studio, consists of a cup of coffee and a piece of bread.⁹

Church was rumored to place his easel at the far end of his spacious second-floor studio. After applying each new brushstroke, he walked to the other end to inspect his handiwork from a distance, covering, as one version had it "between ten and fifteen miles a day."¹⁰ Visitors to the Tenth Street Studio Building could imagine that they heard his measured tread as he paced back and forth behind his closed door.

An air of mystery surrounded the process of painting, fostered by the language used in its description. Artists and writers couched their accounts of rather simple artistic activities in mystical terms, mostly for dramatic effect. Theodore Winthrop thus expressed the purpose of Church's 1856 trip to Maine and New Hampshire: "to pencil rapidly the wondrous scene, [and] when he had finished his dashing sketch of this glory, so transitory, he peppered the whole with cabalistic cipher, which, only he could interpret into beauty."¹¹ Church's cryptic numerology called to mind Leonardo da Vinci's penchant for rendering his drawings and scientific observations incomprehensible to all but himself, in his case by writing backwards.¹² "Cabalistic cipher" is language usually reserved for magicians and priests. The act of rendering the visible in private terms, to be

transformed through the alchemy of the studio into paintings fully comprehensible to all, became reason enough to follow the artist's movements in the press in anticipation of the final results.

Most artists used the privacy of their studios to advantage, freely mixing plein-air and studio sketches. When Church returned from his summer in Labrador in 1859, he brought back with him numerous plein-air sketches in oil and in pencil and gouache; however, he also experimented with structural and compositional elements while painting *The Icebergs* (fig. 23). Two years later, when Church exhibited the finished painting, he also displayed at least one oil sketch for it in the Tenth Street studio of his friend the sculptor Launt Thompson. This sketch attracted the attention of a reviewer, who noted:

Much as we admire the larger production we are more pleased or rather impressed with this small study of a solitary and gigantic visitor from the Arctic seas. It is more simple, more grand, and more impressive. How true it is, that the slight sketch or study direct from nature, is more worthy than the elaborated works on the easel.¹³

In this case what the reviewer took for a plein-air oil sketch, described as that of the "main iceberg" in the easel painting, was painted far from coastal Labrador.¹⁴ Church invented the icescape, drafting and painting numerous studio sketches in pencil and in oil as he established and modified the composition for his Great Picture. There was no point to be gained in Church's correcting the reviewer's perception that what he saw



FIG. 23 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Icebergs*, 1861. Oil on canvas, $64\frac{3}{8} \times 112\frac{1}{2}$ in. Dallas Museum of Art, anonymous gift, 1979.28



FIG. 24 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "The Icebergs,"* 1860. Oil on canvas, 10×18 in. Private collection

was a plein-air oil sketch. Perceived by the writer as a study from nature, the work projected the illusion of direct observation not contradicted by its small size and confirmed Church's ability to project the verity of plein-air execution onto a studio-painted sketch.

The function of Church's oil sketches in his working method was less that of a road map than an accumulated backdrop to an idea. Church typically amassed a portfolio of plein-air sketches in pencil and oils. Many of his pencil drawings bear annotations reminding him of colors and atmospheric effects, effects sometimes translated into painted sketches made on the road or back in his New York studio. Church used these works for inspiration as much as guideposts; given the large number of extant oil sketches, it comes as no surprise that he employed only a small percentage of them as models for specific elements in his easel painting.

The Icebergs stands as a case in point. Borrowing a page from Alexander von Humboldt, Church embodied the German naturalist's call for a landscape painter who made

a greater amount of varying and distinct impressions, which, when imbibed from external contemplation, must be fertilized by the powers of the mind, in order to be presented to the senses of others as a creative work of Art. The grander style of heroic landscape-painting is the combined result of a profound appreciation of Nature, and of this inward process of the mind.¹⁵

Church used his numerous oil sketches and pencil drawings to learn the forms and become comfortable with the lexicon of the Arctic region, but when he turned to the canvas, he invented much of what he needed based on what he had learned. His final preliminary study (fig. 24) set many of the painting's basic features and thereby served as a template for further invention in the Great Picture. In South America Church adopted a similar pattern, bringing together sketches from disparate locations along his route in the service of such paintings as *The Heart of the Andes* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). The artist, who was often extolled for the "truth" of his Great Pictures, admitted privately that none of his South American scenes was a direct transcription of a single place but that each was an amalgam of details and features drawn from his travels and sketches.¹⁶ It was a paradigm both within Church's oeuvre and among landscape painters as a whole.

In this regard Church synthesized Cole's predilection for observing nature firsthand. Church used his sketches and his memory to recast his experiences in a composed landscape with Humboldt's description of the benefits of working *en plein air*. Humboldt viewed nature as a multifaceted, interrelated whole in which man and nature existed in harmony. His epic book *Cosmos* (published in English beginning in 1849) encouraged Church's lifelong interest in sketching aspects of the landscape informed by geological cycles, the cycles of creation itself. An amateur artist, Humboldt combined a passion for art with one for science in pursuit of greater universal truths, and wrote of the need for an artist to capture the specifics of a region in color:

Coloured sketches, taken directly from nature, are the only means by which the artist, on his return, may reproduce the character of distant regions in the more elaborately finished pictures; and this object will be the more fully attained, where the painter has, at the same time, drawn or painted directly from nature a large number of separate studies of the foliage of trees; of leafy, flowering, or fruit-bearing stems; of prostrate trunks, overgrown with pothos and orchideae.¹⁷

In contrast to Church's absorption of the character of a place through his sketches, Bierstadt best epitomized the traditional European approach to constructing a painting from specific features and forms copied from his oil sketches. In 1853 Bierstadt left for Europe an untutored and, by most accounts, untalented aspiring artist, to return four years later a confident and proficient painter. As Worthington Whittredge recalled, neither he nor Bierstadt studied formally at the Düsseldorf Academy (although both spoke German and lodged with local artists); instead, they relied on observation of artists and direct study from nature to provide them with the training necessary for success.¹⁸ Bierstadt's blossoming as an artist demonstrated to his American audience the benefits to be accrued from plein-air work. Whittredge wrote of his friend's first year in Düsseldorf:

[H]e [Bierstadt] fitted up a paint box, stool and umbrella which he put with a few pieces of clothing into a large knapsack, and shouldering it one cold April morning, he started off to try his luck among the Westphalian peasants where he expected to work. He remained away without a word to us until

late autumn when he returned loaded down with innumerable studies of all sorts, oaks, roadsides, meadows, glimpses of water, exteriors of Westphalian cottages, and one very remarkable study of sunlight on the steps of an old church. . . . It was a remarkable summer's work for anybody to do, and for one who had had little or no instruction, it was simply marvellous. He set to work in my studio immediately on large canvases composing and putting together parts of studies he had made, and worked with an industry which left no daylight to go to waste.¹⁹

Industry proved to be as influential a concept as truth in measuring the importance of plein-air painting. The connotations of "industry" were flexible enough to serve as either accolade or criticism, depending on who wielded the term. In general, industry was a trait venerated during the first two-thirds of the century, implying a studious approach to nature. It was an index calculated by means of the impressive quantity of painted material with which an artist returned from his travels. Frequently, however, industry was invoked as a backhanded compliment, as Jasper Francis Cropsey must have known after a reviewer noted: "Judging from the large number of pictures he has sent home, and the quantities of elaborate sketches with which it is said his portfolio is stocked, he will at any rate maintain the reputation of being one of the most industrious of American Artists."²⁰ Industrious, but not necessarily inspired. Such critics noted that quantity could carry an artist only so far, but as a criterion of dedication to the task at hand, it at least provided a concrete standard by which to judge the results.

In Bierstadt's case, his slow and unimpressive start was followed by a burst of activity that attracted tremendous and mostly favorable response. The reviews of *Lake Lucerne* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), Bierstadt's first major painting after his return from Europe, hailed among its merits the "fifty studies in the open air" the artist employed in its making, of a total of five hundred plein-air studies Bierstadt had made in Switzerland alone.²¹ That number is no doubt inflated, even if it encompassed the total number of sketches Bierstadt made during four years in Europe; it was more likely meant to forestall criticism that the painting lacked authenticity, or that the artist lacked ability. The numbers reminded viewers of the amount

of work that went into learning the landscape and of the varied wellsprings of inspiration from which the artist developed each consecutive masterpiece.

Fascination with the sheer number of Bierstadt's sketches would sound as a leitmotif of his working method. The gallery announcement for the exhibition of *The Emerald Pool* in San Francisco in 1871 described the painting and mentioned that "more than two hundred studies were made for it, the larger number of which were used in painting the foreground."²² Reviewers consistently repeated such statistics as if the accumulation of such an oeuvre were a true measure of the significance of the finished work. This undue emphasis placed on the quantity of preliminary material inevitably backfired, as the index of "industry" all too often preempted consideration of creativity and achievement.

For his first western subject, the Wind River range in what is now Wyoming, Bierstadt relied on a large number of oil sketches, some painted entirely *en plein air*, others begun out-of-doors and carefully finished at a subsequent sitting.²³ Comparing *Nebraska [Territory]: Wasatch Mountains* (cat. 74) with *Wind River Country* (fig. 25) makes apparent the distinction between plein-air work painted at a single sitting and oil sketches receiving further amplification. In *Wasatch Mountains* Bierstadt paid closest attention to the sense of atmosphere and light on the landscape, using broad strokes of thin paint to suggest the contours of the terrain. In *Wind River Country* he turned his attention to delineating the geology of the upturned rocks that appear in the right middle distance of *Wasatch Mountains*. *Wind River Country* appears to have been begun in the field, although the careful addition of highlights and structural details indicate the artist continued to work on this sketch after allowing the primary surface to dry. During the two weeks he spent in the area, Bierstadt paid particular attention to this outcrop, and it became a prominent feature in his subsequent Wind River canvases, notable among them *View from the Wind River Mountains, Wyoming* (fig. 26), finished in 1860 shortly after the artist's return to New York.²⁴ In his Wind River canvases Bierstadt repeated specific elements from his plein-air arsenal, often working from numerous preliminaries as part of his carefully orchestrated method. Each of the sketches he painted in the field added to his total knowledge of the site, relieving him of the need to make any one of them a comprehensive study of the scenery.

Bierstadt's field sketches, a number of which have

FIG. 25 Albert Bierstadt,
Wind River Country, 1859.
Oil on paper mounted on
board, 13 × 18½ in. Private
collection



FIG. 26 Albert Bierstadt,
*View from the Wind River
Mountains, Wyoming*, 1860.
Oil on canvas, 30 × 48½ in.
Courtesy, Museum of Fine
Arts, Boston, Gift of
Martha C. Karolik for the
M. and M. Karolik Collec-
tion of American Paintings,
1815–1865, 47.1202



recently come to light,²⁵ tend to be painted with a sweeping shorthand or hurried staccato brushwork. Plainly painted under time constraints, the thin paint minimizing drying time, they captured effects of light and embody general observations about the terrain (fig. 27). The overall compositional unity in many of these sketches exceeds that found in his more detailed studies. One of the hallmarks of Bierstadt's plein-air work is a pronounced disjuncture in scale between the elements depicted, even when they are linked by a background landscape (see cat. 69). In lavishing attention on individual components of the sketch, the artist imbued each with its own cohesive integrity at the expense of

the whole. Where Bierstadt sketched a single animal or figure the amount of anatomical detail suggests it may have been painted over a longer time frame, perhaps after multiple sessions (fig. 28). Similarly, landscapes featuring a single point of interest like a geyser or a tree offer evidence of the intense concentration with which the artist worked. These latter types of sketches ended up in his extensive filing system or fitted into wooden frames that lined the walls of his studios.

The artist's studio sketches tend to be more carefully composed landscapes, often including some kind of narrative activity (see cat. 81). Many of these works are complete, well-composed paintings, incorporating



FIG. 27 Albert Bierstadt, *Black Hills, Colorado*. Oil on paper mounted on board, 14 × 19 in. From the Collection of Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, 0136.28



FIG. 28 Albert Bierstadt, *Buckskin Horse*. Oil on paper, 13¼ × 18¾ in.

a wealth of detail consistent with the artist's larger canvases and therefore might just as easily be considered small-scale finished paintings. Like their more broadly brushed counterparts, many of these finished sketches were done on artist's board rather than canvas and therefore share the same scale as the artist's fieldwork. Commensurate with the additional effort required in their making, these studio sketches made up the bulk of the smaller paintings Bierstadt sold during his lifetime, further indication that their purpose was less to teach himself nature's forms and more to vary the scale of finished works in his oeuvre. Occasionally Bierstadt painted a reduced-scale version of a larger work, either

as a preliminary study or an after-the-fact replica, although this practice was unusual.²⁶

Display of these oil sketches also provided a context for evaluating the artist's accomplishments, both in the field and in the studio. Sketches chosen for display in an artist's studio generally demonstrated more confident handling or contained the kernel of another painting, showing off to advantage the artist's abilities rather than exposing his limitations. Hanging sketches in the studio was a common practice, demonstrating to visitors an artist's range, referring to projects under way, or providing incentive for a client to request elaboration of a particular sketch capturing his fancy.

In 1874 a reporter from Utica visited Bierstadt's Tenth Street studio and commented on the artist's organization of his sketches:

[Bierstadt] showed me a large number of his original sketches. These sketches, let me observe, are mostly in oil . . . and were made in the open air at all seasons of the year, not excepting winter. They are classified, for the most part, according to the country or district where they were made, and are arranged in separate portfolios kept in closets or trunks, so that any sketch which may be wanted for a particular purpose can be found without a moment's delay. The California sketches were most numerous.²⁷

Bierstadt's elaborate and effective filing system for his field and studio oil sketches made them the bulwark of his oeuvre. Clients desiring a particular view could count on the artist's ability to select the appropriate sketches for location, staffage, and seasonal effect as the basis for recombination in a new easel painting. Beginning with *Lake Lucerne*, reviewers considered Bierstadt's oil sketches as templates for specific components of his paintings, and their prominent display in his studio drew attention to their function (see chap. 4, 91). By contrast, in 1887, when Charles Dudley Warner prepared to write about Church's trips to Mexico, Church finally wrote to confess: "My more completed sketches on or about Potzcuaro lake and Morelia I have mislaid. I made a thorough (or so it seemed to me) search for them before I left Olana. I investigated scores of portfolios and spent hours every day for nearly a week in the vain endeavor to find them. I conclude that I put them aside temporarily in some snug corner which my memory does not recal [*sic*]." ²⁸

In America as in Europe, artists tended to keep private those works they considered unfinished; such incomplete statements appeared to expose the artistic process in a less than favorable light.²⁹ Unwillingness to expose both unresolved visual problems and the more personalized vision of a sketch—often tempered in the translation from sketch to painting to achieve a more generalized or idealized vision—meant most artists opened their sketchbooks and portfolios only to fellow artists. As Church described it, "No conscientious Artist is willing to let out of his hands for any purpose whatever—rubbishly sketches—raw, ill-digested things—mere 'pot Boilers.'" ³⁰

If the bulk of Church's oil sketches have a grace and fluidity that belie the time and effort expended on them, many of Bierstadt's oil sketches capture the artist's struggle to come to grips with his subject,³¹ their more carefully studied forms and more labored surfaces standing in marked contrast to Church's facile brush. These private tools enabled an artist to practice his technique and learn the forms crucial to his major paintings, literally teaching himself the anatomy of animals and mountains. George Sheldon recounted that Gifford made preliminary oil sketches for "the purpose of defining to him just what he wants to do, and of fixing it in enduring material. Sometimes the sketch is not successful, and is thrown aside to make room for another."³² Since the sketch was the arena of experimentation and learning, failures were inevitable.

Gifford's method of working differed significantly from that of any of his colleagues and is worth examining in detail. Whereas Bierstadt brought together elements from a variety of sketches, Gifford took a more linear approach, progressing from pencil sketches to a series of incrementally larger oil sketches before approaching the final canvas. His initial sketches in pencil usually took the form of small thumbnail sketches in a bound sketchbook or on

a piece of paper not larger than an ordinary visiting card. On returning to New York after a summer trip, his pockets contained many such souvenirs, which subsequently were re-sketched in oil, on a larger scale, the canvas being say, twelve inches by eight, and the time consumed not more than two hours. When one of these oil-studies was finished he was about ready to paint a picture from it. The preliminary experimenting—the process of selection and rejection—had been accomplished.³³

Sheldon's account of Gifford's technique makes it clear that a significant number of the artist's small oil sketches were painted after his return from the field. Still, Gifford did paint *en plein air* throughout his life, often using the butt end of the brush to score the wet paint with his signature and the date (see cat. 64). Signed and dated oil sketches occur as early as the 1840s and as late as the 1870s. Their inscriptions can often be matched with Gifford's dated journal entries, the two together providing a reliable record of his whereabouts and activities. The brushwork in these plein-air works is sometimes exuberant, thinly and rapidly applied to capture a fleeting

effect of weather against the landscape features. Small in scale, they are the artist's first apprehension of a subject considered for later amplification. Still, these documentable plein-air sketches are vastly outnumbered by the ones that were painted indoors. Gifford combined his own facility for on-site oil sketches with Cole's preference for preliminaries painted in the studio, often with the genesis of a finished painting in mind.

Gifford's proclivity for painting indoor sketches was magnified while he was traveling. When faced with inclement weather he remained in his hotel room to paint oil sketches based on his plein-air work in both pencil and oils. In his European journal covering the years 1855–57, Gifford recorded a significant number of "rainy day" oil sketches, usually painting a subject he had already sketched under better weather. As an example, Gifford made a suite of on-site pencil sketches of Windsor Castle on 9–10 July, followed by a plein-air oil sketch dated 11 July. From that work he painted a subsequent oil sketch of larger dimensions, noting in his journal, "23rd . . . A rainy day. Made an oil sketch of Windsor Castle."³⁴

The *Memorial Catalogue* of Gifford's work, compiled following the artist's death in 1880, provides a template for his painting technique.³⁵ There on the printed pages, organized by motif and location, is the sequence of works in oil leading to what the artist called his "Chief Pictures." In most cases the catalogue lists more than one preliminary work on the same subject, sometimes as many as three. In general each successive sketch was painted at a slightly larger scale, and the progression from the smallest sketch to the largest finished picture stayed fairly consistent throughout the artist's oeuvre. Gifford's method of scaling-up his composition as a prelude to painting a Chief Picture is unique to him.

The development of Gifford's *Lake Nemi* (cat. 53) is a case in point. After walking from Rome and circumambulating the lake itself, Gifford recorded the view from the town of Nemi. From his lodgings overlooking the lake, Gifford made several drawings in pencil, one a broad panorama extending across both leaves of his sketchbook (fig. 93), another a thumbnail sketch in which he composed the scene as he would paint it. The following evening Gifford made his first oil sketch, dated 7 October 1856. Although this first work is unlocated, another one (cat. 51) appears to have been painted either *en plein air* or at least on site. This boasts the vigorous brushwork endemic to Gifford's plein-air work,

its surface painted mostly wet-on-wet. Compared to his pencil drawings and to the subsequent oil sketch (cat. 52) and the finished painting (cat. 53), this work shows a more compressed view of the lake, in part due to its small size and squarer shape and in part because the perspective adopted is lower and shifted to the artist's right. The distant hill and tower are also painted from this lower vantage point, accentuating the depth of the extinct volcano's rim and the steep sides of its caldera. Such modifications and the explosive brushwork support the possibility that this is a small plein-air or on-site oil rather than a finished sketch painted much after the fact.

After returning to Rome, Gifford painted the larger, more finished version, dated 21 October 1856 (cat. 52), indicating he had already begun the process of composing and painting his Chief Picture (cat. 53). Such intermediate paintings, bridges between the initial sketches in pencil and oil and the finished painting, strongly resemble the Chief Picture in both compositional arrangement and surface treatment. This later oil sketch strongly resembles the two-page pencil drawing Gifford initially made of the lake (fig. 93), and it closely follows the contours of the foreground foliage and the placement of the prominent hill topped by a tower in the middle distance. It is also the oil sketch that most closely resembles the finished painting. Here and in the Chief Picture, Gifford has extended the view laterally, easing the spatial compression of the plein-air oil sketch.

Gifford's repetitiveness was highly unusual but served a purpose specific to his aims as a painter. After establishing his composition with the first sketch, he rarely deviated significantly from that initial design. Scaling-up was a deliberate process of abstraction. Each successive stage was once removed from the preceding effort; each stage moved the artist and his subject further from direct impressions of nature. It was a reclusive method, well suited to Gifford's introspective temperament. His friend and fellow artist John F. Weir apprehended it best, remarking, "Gifford's art . . . was not realistic in the formal sense. It was nature passed through the alembic of a finely-organized sensibility. . . . He valued, accordingly, the deeper values that remain in the memory as a residuum of impressions derived from nature."³⁶ That process of distillation is at the core of Gifford's art. His working method reveals it as a step-by-step process conducted almost entirely indoors. By

degrees he achieved a suffused, lambent atmosphere that differed little from region to region. Whether painting a view of Lake Nemi, the Hudson valley, Mount Ranier, or Egypt, Gifford's light enveloped the landscape with a hazy glow, unifying the coloristic structure as it softened contours and amplified the suggestive qualities of the scene. The transcendental quality in Gifford's paintings is not that of religion but of spirit, a dematerialization of raw nature into an ethereal, unified world. In this respect, Gifford, of all the midcentury American landscape painters, may have been closest to Emerson in his synthesis of the writer's transcendentalist precepts, without ever formally embracing his religion.

The abstract, intellectual qualities of Gifford's *Chief Pictures* sometimes eluded even his friends. Gifford's friend Edmund Stedman remarked, "We always thought Gifford's fondness for making finished cabinet pictures from his first sketches most fortunate, as they often surpassed his larger canvasses."³⁷ These "finished cabinet pictures," like Bierstadt's small finished sketches and Church's final preliminary oil sketches, were attractive both for their appearance and their price, often less than half that of a full-scale painting.³⁸ Some of Gifford's small finished pictures were undoubtedly the intermediate oil sketches painted in the studio, like the intermediate oil sketch of Lake Nemi (cat. 52). These replicas helped satisfy friends and persistent patrons interested in acquiring smaller works.

Gifford also painted oil sketches long after he had finished a major painting. All four of the oil sketches Gifford sold to the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon in 1859 were painted in the studio, years after the artist had returned from traveling to the sites in person (see cats. 55, 56). Patrons who desired a version of one of Gifford's compositions were happy to accept a studio painting of small to medium scale; it was the artist who was often hesitant to repeat himself after much time had passed. In one notable instance, when faced with a request to paint yet another Venetian scene, Gifford agreed reluctantly to unearth his Venetian sketches and see if "perhaps something more may come out of them—but of that I am not confident."³⁹ Even small paintings made after the fact required that Gifford paint preliminary sketches for them, as is made clear by the artist's subsequent letter to Weir, in which he remarks, "I have been shifting the Venetian material about in my head with reference to your diagram, and I think I will be able to get something out of it of the sort required

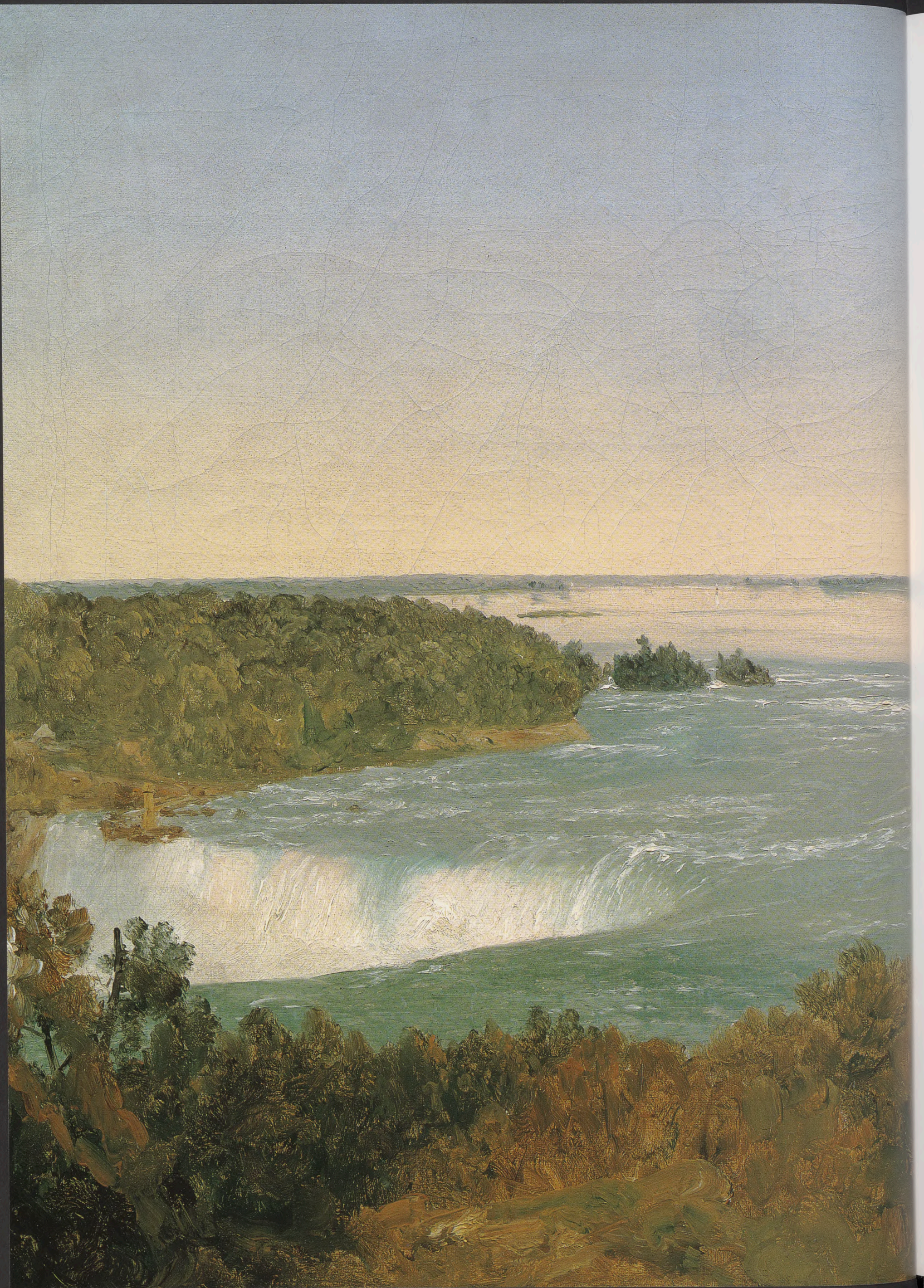
—I will not be sure about it til I make a sketch in color which I will do very soon."⁴⁰

Ironically, the principal casualty of the burgeoning interest in sketches was the philosophical distinction between plein-air and studio oil sketches. What replaced it was the more tangible and satisfying critical judgment of whether a sketch was good or bad, regardless of where it was made. As George Sheldon wrote in 1882, "Good sketches and studies are perfect in themselves, however slight and fragmentary. They have unity of sentiment, singleness of purpose, homogeneity of expression; whether made within-doors or out-of-doors, they are the spontaneous, honest outcome of communion with Nature; and, finally, their force is concentrated, economized, and well directed."⁴¹ Access to the artists' studios, and by extension to their idiosyncratic ways of working, gradually eroded the critical distinction separating sketches painted indoors and out-of-doors. The making of studio sketches no longer signified an atrophied mind or implied a "false" character to the rest of the painter's art. The blurring of plein-air and studio work served another, more significant, purpose, that of recognizing that the artist in the field was not simply recording objectively aspects of nature for later interpretation but was making decisions and taking artistic license as he would indoors. The oil sketch moved significantly closer to consideration as a full-fledged work of art when the viewer recognized and accepted that the artist was consciously editing, selecting, and modifying what he saw and experienced, whether he painted in the field or in the studio.

NOTES

1. Cole to Gilmor, 25 December 1826; quoted in *Annual II: Studies on Thomas Cole, an American Romanticist* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1967), 47.
2. Several scholars have done an admirable job of discussing Cole's *Course of Empire* from its genesis to fruition. The interested reader is directed to Angela Miller, "Thomas Cole and Jacksonian America: *The Course of Empire* and Political Allegory," *Prospects* 14 (1989): 65–92; Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire," in William H. Truettner and Wallach, eds., *Thomas Cole: Landscape into History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, for the National Museum of American Art, 1993), esp. 90–98; and Ellwood C. Parry III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), esp. chap. 4.
3. Theodore Stebbins has suggested that the small number of extant oil sketches from this trip, and the relatively poor condition of those that survive, meant that the balance of them had been badly damaged and destroyed. This is certainly possible; however, the large number of pencil drawings (over 50) may indicate that the artist worked primarily in pencil on this trip. Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *Close Observation: Selected Oil Sketches by Frederic E. Church* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 23–24.
4. Gerald Carr postulates that Church painted the oil sketch at the Hacienda de Chipichí, where he stayed the night of 29 August. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1:211.
5. In his diary Church wrote, "On a mossy seat I opened my sketchbook and as time was short I commenced a hasty sketch and as I trace a few lines rapidly over the paper I will embody them as well as I am able in a description." Frederic Edwin Church, *South American diary, 1853*. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, David C. Huntington Archives (Olana Archives).
6. "The Academy Exhibition.—No. I," *Crayon* 1, no. 13 (28 March 1855): 203.
7. Church to Miss Eliza Bierstadt, Hudson, N.Y., 8 September 1869. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera (Winterthur Library).
8. Durand, "Letter on Landscape Painting. Letter I," *Crayon* 1, no. 1 (3 January 1855): 2.
9. George W. Sheldon, "How One Landscape-Painter Paints," *Art Journal* (New York), n.s., 3 (1877): 284–85. In light of the intensity with which Gifford approached painting in his studio, little wonder he felt that "Studio and pictures are getting to seem like mere foolishness, and nothing in the world seems worth so much as to be out of doors, to walk in the sun, and to breathe the genial air." Gifford to J. F. Weir, 8 March 1868, John Ferguson Weir Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven (Yale); quoted in Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 113.
10. Henry Willard French, *Art and Artists in Connecticut* (New York: Charles T. Dillingham, 1879), 131.
11. Theodore Winthrop, *Life in the Open Air, and Other Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), 108; quoted in David C. Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826–1900: Painter of the Adamic New World Myth" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1960), 65. The frontispiece to Winthrop's volume is an engraving made from an oil sketch by Church of Mount Katahdin (see fig. 74), given to Winthrop (cat. 26).
12. Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* was widely read; Jasper Francis Cropsey transcribed entire pages of it into an early sketchbook. See Kenneth Maddox, *An Unprejudiced Eye: The Drawings of Jasper F. Cropsey* (Yonkers, N.Y.: The Hudson River Museum, 1979), 8 ff. Durand, too, seemed inspired by Leonardo's writings in his own "Letters on Landscape Painting." For consideration of Leonardo da Vinci's influence in America, see Katherine E. Manthorne, "Theory and Practice: Leonardo da Vinci's Importance for American Artists, 1820–1860," in *The Italian Presence in American Art, 1760–1860*, ed. Irma B. Jaffe (New York: Fordham University, 1989), esp. 56–62 ff.
13. *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 18 June 1861; quoted in Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: The Icebergs* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1980), 97 n. 2.
14. That oil sketch is discussed at length in *ibid.*, 69–71.
15. Humboldt, quoted in "Gleanings and Items," *Crayon* 3, no. 3 (April 1856): 124.
16. "I am inclined to think however that it is not an actual view for I seldom painted other than compositions of South American Scenery." Church to Mr. William MacLeod, Hudson, N.Y., 20 December 1873. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives, Washington, D.C.
17. Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*, trans. E. C. Otté, 2 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849–50), 2:452.
18. The German artist Emanuel Leutze arrived in Düsseldorf in 1841, remaining until 1859, when he immigrated to New York. He was instrumental in acclimatizing American artists to German customs and helped found the German-American artists' club, called Malkasten (paint box), to foster an international camaraderie. See Barbara Groseclose, "The Hudson and the Rhine: Exhibition Review," *American Art Review* (July–August 1976): 115 ff.; and Anneliese Harding and Brucia Witthoft, *American Artists in Düsseldorf, 1840–1865* (Danforth, Conn.: Danforth Museum, 1982).
19. Whittredge, "The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge, 1820–1910," ed. John I. H. Baur, *Brooklyn Museum Journal* 1 (1942): 26–27. Although Whittredge described this work as dating from Bierstadt's first summer afield, Henry Tuckerman notes correctly that the work dates from Bierstadt's second summer afield: "His next tour, the following year, was through Hesse-Cassel; and while there, he was much struck, one afternoon, with a beautiful effect of light and shade; on the mossy, massive front and low arched door of a quaint mediaeval church, with a wide-spreading venerable tree beside the wall, and an old woman seated under the gateway." Tuckerman, "Albert Bierstadt," *Galaxy* 1

- (15 August 1866): 679; reprinted in Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1867), 388.
20. "Movements of Artists," *Literary World* 5, no. 132 (11 August 1849): 113.
21. *New Bedford Evening Standard*, 6 April 1858. *Home Journal*, 3 April 1858, p. 2, col. 7, repeated the reference to 500 studies in Switzerland "painted in the open air."
22. Snow and Roos's Art Gallery, *Catalogue. Exhibition of "The Emerald Pool," White Mountains*, by A. Bierstadt (San Francisco, August 1871). Hendricks also cites a report in the *San Francisco Daily Alta* (31 July 1871), in which Bierstadt affirmed having painted 200 studies made the previous fall from the Glen House. Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1974), 196.
23. There are over 30 signed and inscribed plein-air oil sketches of this location, many of them in the collections of the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the Stark Museum, Orange, Texas.
24. On a handwritten label attached to the finished painting, Bierstadt wrote, *View looking North west from the Wind River Mountains. the Wasatch Mountains seen in the distance. Sketched from nature July 1st 1859. Painted in New York 1860. A. Bierstadt.* As Patricia Trenton and Peter Hassrick note, Bierstadt was looking at the Wind River Range and not the Wasatch Mountains, which are in Utah, southwest of his location near South Pass, Wyoming. See Trenton and Hassrick, *The Rocky Mountains: A Vision for Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, in association with the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming, 1983), esp. 121, 126.
25. Numerous oil sketches have been included in auctions held at Christie's and Sotheby's, New York, particularly in the last five years, and others have appeared with dealers from New York to California. Many of these have a provenance that includes members of Bierstadt's family.
26. Bierstadt painted two nearly identical versions of Estes Park, Colorado; the larger version, done in 1869, oil on canvas, measures 32 x 48 in. (Manogian Collection); the finished sketch, of ca. 1869, oil on paper mounted on board, measures 11 1/4 x 19 in. (private collection). It is not clear which version was painted first.
27. "Bierstadt in the Studio," *Utica Morning Herald and Daily Gazette*, 16 September 1874, 2; recounted in "What Bierstadt Is Doing," *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, 25 September 1874.
28. Church to Charles Dudley Warner, Brevoort House, N.Y., 23 January 1887. Olana Archives.
29. Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier was among the large majority of artists who guarded the privacy of their oil sketches. Although his finished canvases are noted for their polished surfaces and attention to detail, his sketches reveal a more exuberant touch. He painted extensively *en plein air*; his small landscapes capturing the play of light on various forms. His sketches were not available to the public until after his death. Meissonier wrote, "I have always maintained the conviction that while one is alive, one's duty is to show the finished work and not the way it was made." O. Gréard, *Meissonier*, trans. Lady Lloyd and Mrs. Simmons (London, 1897), 20; quoted in John Wisdom, *French Nineteenth-Century Oil Sketches: David to Degas* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: William Hayes Ackland Memorial Art Center, 1978), 100.
30. Church to Mr. Appleton, New York, 16 November 1863. Appleton Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
31. The unevenness of Bierstadt's oeuvre is as much a function of his erratic ability as a painter as it is a result of the mounting modern evidence of dubious works, especially among the smaller paintings. Bierstadt's active career spanned nearly five decades. A prolific artist, he painted works that varied in quality and scale. However, assessing his oeuvre has been complicated by the well-meaning addition of spurious signatures to authentic works, the tacit acknowledgment of modern-day forgeries, and the misattribution of works assumed to be by his hand. See Virginia Heimsath Pancoast, "The IFAR Report: Bogus Bierstadts," *Art and Auction* (September 1989): 122.
32. Sheldon, "How One Landscape-Painter Paints," *Art Journal* (New York), n.s., 3 (1877): 284.
33. J[ohn] F. W[eir], "Sanford R. Gifford," *New York Evening Post*, 30 August 1880, 1. Much of the description of Gifford's technique is a close paraphrase of Sheldon's article, "How One Landscape-Painter Paints."
34. Gifford's journal, entry for 23 July 1855, in his letter dated 22 July 1855. Gifford kept a daily journal on each of his European trips that he then sent to his father as a series of letters. A transcript of these letters is in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., reel D21.
35. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *A Memorial Catalogue of the Paintings of Sanford Robinson Gifford, N.A.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1881; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1974).
36. John F. Weir, "Sanford Robinson Gifford, His Life and Character as an Artist and Man," in The Century Association, *Gifford Memorial Meeting of the Century, Friday Evening, November 19th, 1880* (New York: The Century Association, 1880; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1974), 8.
37. Stedman to W. C. Church, 8 January 1908, in Stedman and Gould, *Life and Letters of Edmund Clarence Stedman* (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co., 1910), 2:414; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 33.
38. In March 1867 Gifford painted an oil sketch for Stedman of *The Bronx River* (the easel painting was exhibited that spring at the Academy [unlocated]); Stedman considers it "the most beautiful, dreamy wood-and-water picture you ever saw . . . and at half his price." Stedman to Bayard Taylor, in Stedman and Gould, *Life and Letters*, 1:412-14; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 109. Gifford also noted in his journal that he spent a day indoors "making the sketch I promised Colyer" from on-site pencil sketches made 2 July. Gifford's journal, entry for 7 July 1855, in his letter dated 9 July 1855.
39. Gifford to John F. Weir, 6 May 1875; John Ferguson Weir Papers, Yale; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 144.
40. Gifford to John F. Weir, 18 May 1875; *ibid.*
41. George W. Sheldon, *Hours with Art and Artists* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1882), 128.



The Oil Sketch on Display

An important component of the expanding art market at midcentury was increased access to and interest in artists' oil sketches. Painted sketches made their way into the public domain through a variety of avenues, none couched with more significance than their inclusion in the annual exhibitions at the National Academy of Design and the American Art-Union. In addition, the opening of the Tenth Street Studio Building in 1858 and the clustering of artists in nearby Dodworth's Hall and Waverly House greatly facilitated direct access to the artists' studios, in which oil sketches served as both inspiration and decoration. As the visibility of these small works expanded, so did interest in acquiring them. Hand in hand with these developments was a trend of greater significance: the artists' use of their painted sketches to help market their careers.

Beginning in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, artists in New York City relied primarily on the National Academy of Design and the American Art-Union (AA-U) to exhibit and sell their works, augmented by the patronage of those who sought out the artists in their studios. Founded in 1825, the NAD quickly became the premiere venue for achieving artistic acclaim. The Academy helped cement New York's claim to be the cultural capital of the United States, a status enhanced in 1844 when the American Art-Union joined it as a generally friendly rival.¹

Both organizations held annual juried exhibitions in the spring, and until the demise of the Art-Union in 1852 they vied for each artist's best new work to place on display and to attract supporters. The AA-U differed from the Academy in one significant respect. Founded in 1838 as the Apollo Association

and incorporated as the Art-Union in 1844, it featured an innovative art-distribution system for its subscribers. For the cost of their subscription, members were eligible to win by lottery preselected works of art by the leading artists of the day. Although this system was designed to broaden the appeal of and interest in the fine arts, it was short-lived; in 1852 New York shut down the AA-U as an illegal lottery, leaving only the NAD as a formal space for the exhibition and sale of art.

Although each institution was established to provide exhibition space and an audience for artists' most accomplished works, both fostered an ever-widening appreciation of the painted sketch. From its inception, the Art-Union accepted finished oil sketches in its exhibitions and sales, including several of Asher B. Durand's studies from nature. Despite its early demise, the AA-U exhibited and sold a sizable number of painted sketches and studies from nature, including significant examples by Frederic Edwin Church, Sanford Robinson Gifford, and John Frederick Kensett.

In 1845 Durand succeeded Samuel F. B. Morse as president of the National Academy of Design, a post he would hold until 1861. His tenure as president was a pivotal component of the gradual acceptance of oil sketches, especially carefully painted studies from nature, as exhibitable works. Under Durand's leadership, the Academy displayed selected oil sketches in a "sketch room," separated from the main exhibition hall only by the thickness of the gallery walls. The sketch room often featured Durand's own plein-air efforts, which were reviewed in literary and art journals along with his more polished canvases. His position as president and member of the hanging committee gave Durand wide latitude in determining what was hung in the sketch room.

When the Academy was chartered in 1828, Robert Gilmor wrote from Baltimore to congratulate Thomas Cole:

The "Academy of Design" in your city is a valuable institution for your artists as well as the public. It is calculated to excite emulation among the former & incite to study & attention in their pursuits, while it diffuses a taste for works of art among the latter, and cultivates the general taste. Many a visitor will be inclined to possess himself of a picture (ready executed) which strikes his fancy, who would never think of hunting up an artist in his painting room to order a picture.²

The importance of having oil sketches hung as part of the annual exhibitions at the Academy and the Art-Union lay in the institutions' imprimatur as the arbiters of taste. Although this standard and the judgment of the hanging committee were invariably called into question, acceptance of a work for exhibition was considered proof of an artist's success, as was the location of each painting in the installation and its coverage in the press. These institutions served another purpose as well. Gilmor recognized that the value of the Academy lay not so much in its canonization of aesthetic taste but in its role as facilitator for the sale of works of art and the education of patrons. The NAD thus played a key role in encouraging the acceptance of painted sketches as works of art worthy of public display and private acquisition.

Durand occupied a central position in the burgeoning appreciation of the oil sketch. Between 1844, his first year on the NAD hanging committee, and 1870, he exhibited twenty-two of his painted studies at the Academy. In 1868 he chose to be represented solely by five small works, each titled *Study from Nature*.³ In addition to these, during the 1840s and 1850s Durand sent painted studies to the Art-Union, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Boston Athenaeum, and to Troy, New York, for exhibition.⁴ Often called "finished sketches" by reviewers, they attracted approving attention for their fidelity to form rather than criticism for their less profound and essentially non-narrative subjects.

For Durand, the plein-air canvas—perhaps touched up in the studio—became a signature at public exhibitions, balancing his idealized narrative subjects of pure studio manufacture. When he included two sketches among the seven works he showed at the NAD in 1850, they were described as presenting "a care in the management of the minutest details, and a faithfulness in the execution, which have their reward in a striking success. No one can fail to notice how far superior are the leaves and branches of the trees in these studies, . . . to the blotches of green, gray, and white, which pass in so many landscapes for trees, rocks, and water."⁵ Durand's oil sketches were not the only ones to attract such notice; in an earlier review of the same exhibition, a writer noted approvingly of Durand's influence on the quality of Kensett's oil sketches: "As a painter of trees and rocks we know of no one superior to KENSETT. The characteristics of his style and finish are in many respects very similar to those of the President of the Academy.

Indeed, there are two studies of rocks . . . the former by Durand and the latter by Kensett, which one would suppose, even after a close inspection, to have been the work of but a single hand."⁶

In execution and purpose, Durand's studies from nature were closer to small, intimate finished landscapes than his colleagues' more cursory plein-air oil sketches. Painting his sketches to completion did not entirely rob them of their plein-air character; rather, it enhanced their suitability for public display. Durand was aware that these works did not contain the high moral message of Cole's allegories; however, they did contain references to the element of spirituality implicit in the appreciation of landscape painting.⁷ His conflation of sketch and finish in these plein-air works effectively created a new category of paintings, one that could be exhibited on its own merits as a legible composition yet was praised for its painterly verve. Certainly the existence of the sketch room at the NAD encouraged a wide range of artists to submit smaller paintings and finished sketches for exhibition. Durand's works hung alongside sketches and studies by William Sidney Mount, Regis Gignoux, David Johnson, Kensett, Church, Gifford, and others. Judging from the reviews, landscapes were in the majority there as they were in the main halls, remaining the dominant genre between 1850 and the final decades of the century.

The establishment of the sketch room created a dichotomy in the standards used to evaluate paintings. Issues of finish and completion automatically applied to easel paintings had to be modified to accommodate the painterly qualities of the sketch. In exhibition reviews a work acknowledged as a sketch or study was appraised on its merits as such, rather than on its lack of polish. As the *Crayon* put it, "It is necessary to realize character to give painting the dignity of portraiture even, but if it does no more, it is *only* portraiture, and so only a mental photograph not subject to criticism any more than Kensett's studies of rocks in the small room."⁸ The reviewer's comparison of Kensett's studies to "mental photograph[s]" takes into account the underlying precept that most of these studies represented ends in and of themselves, without aspiring to higher intellectual goals.

An artist's reputation was not made on such works, but neither was it damaged by their informality. However, it became increasingly difficult for reviewers to maintain dual standards within a single article on the

Academy's exhibitions. The painterly qualities of the sketch were compared favorably with the more polished surfaces and intellectual leanings of many finished canvases. Gradually, art criticism, following the lead of the artists themselves, blurred the lines between painted studies and finished paintings.

Durand was not alone in presenting landscape sketches to the public at such an early stage in his career. The 1848 NAD exhibition featured two of Gifford's works titled *Sketch from Nature* that were then purchased by the Art-Union. Whether Gifford's paintings were plein-air sketches or studio pieces, they owed a debt to Durand's example as both an influential painter and administrator.⁹ The following year a work by Gifford titled *A Sketch from Nature* was included in the Art-Union exhibition. Kensett, too, offered finished sketches for sale at this time; in 1848 he sent *Raven Hill, Elizabethtown, Essex County, N.Y.* (private collection) and a *Study from Nature* (unidentified) to the Art-Union for "disposal" at seventy-five dollars, noting that they were both "studies from nature."¹⁰ The following year he sold two more painted sketches through the Art-Union. The first was *Scene on the Cauterskill*, described as "a study of rocks, water, and foliage, with a rustic bridge in the middle distance"; the second, *Scene among the Catskills*, was described as "a study of rocks and foliage, with a distant view to the mountains."¹¹ As his work matured, Kensett, like Durand, augmented some of his outdoor sketches to a point that made them indistinguishable from sketches painted wholly within doors. He also painted copies of his plein-air sketches, retaining the rougher, less-finished preambles to be used as preliminary studies for his easel paintings. Reflecting on Kensett's reluctance to sell his field sketches, a writer essentially defined the term *finished sketch*, noting, "From such simple materials [plein-air sketches] Kensett produced a vast number of studies that may, indeed, be called pictures, so fully is their want of elaboration."¹² Before long, Jervis McEntee and a host of other landscape painters regularly made use of the opportunities provided by the NAD and AA-U to place their sketches and studies on public view, many of them for sale.

Perhaps encouraged by the welcoming climate, Church's first submissions for exhibition at the NAD and the AA-U included both easel paintings and oil sketches, setting an early precedent in his career. *View in Pittsford, Vermont*, described by one reviewer as a "highly finished sketch"¹³ and by another as "one of the



FIG. 29 Frederic Edwin Church, *Abandoned Skiff* (also known as *An Old Boat*), 1850. Oil on composition board, 11 × 17 in. Inscribed and dated lower right: *Mt. Desert 1850*. Copyright © Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza

closest and most minutely traced transcripts of nature which we have ever seen,"¹⁴ appeared at the AA-U in 1849, while the following year *Autumn, a Sketch* made its debut at the NAD.¹⁵ These favorable comments directed at Church's more polished oil sketches reflected the strength of the Ruskinian "truth to nature" doctrine as a yardstick by which they were judged.

In 1850 Church took his first step in marketing his own work. It was common for journalists to publish accounts of artists' summer travels in anticipation of the paintings that would go on view at the NAD and AA-U the following spring. In the November issue of the AA-U *Bulletin* appeared an anonymous article titled "Mountain Views and Coast Scenery, by a Landscape Painter," recounting the author's overcoming the trials

and hazards of fog and mosquitoes as he valiantly strove to capture fleeting effects on paper and board during a visit to Mount Desert Island in Maine. He described the vaguely dramatic episodes that led to the creation of the painted sketches, including a fog bank rolling in at Frenchman's Bay, "which, however, has not prevented our transferring to canvas an old hull of a boat, and some rocks, this morning."¹⁶ That article, apparently written by Church himself, placed the art world on notice to expect to see views of the Maine coast in the spring.¹⁷

Indeed, Church submitted a suite of paintings and finished sketches of the region to the NAD and the AA-U in 1851. Reviewers praised his easel paintings and delighted in his oil sketch titled *An Old Boat* (fig. 29) at



FIG. 30 Frederic Edwin Church, *Mount Desert Island, Maine*, 1850. Oil on board, 12 × 15½ in. Private collection

the NAD,¹⁸ which recalled the race against time and fog described in his article. One reviewer declared it a "singular success . . . we do not recall any finer sketch of that particular effect."¹⁹ Simultaneously Church exhibited a companion oil sketch, *Mount Desert Island, Maine* (fig. 30) at the Art-Union, where it was sold for fifty dollars to S. W. Bridgham. The artist's anonymous narrative had piqued the public's interest in these finished sketches, assuring Church that his smaller efforts would attract buyers and not go unnoticed amid the rooms of more ambitious landscapes. From this point forward, Church made effective use of published accounts of his travels and descriptions of his plein-air production, attracting an audience for himself as well as his art.

Beginning in 1856 Church initiated a daring and highly successful marketing venture that accentuated the growing independence of his oil sketches as publicly exhibitable works of art. In the spring of 1857, in a departure from the standard unveiling of major efforts at the NAD, *Niagara* (see fig. 75) made its debut at the commercial gallery of Williams, Stevens, and Williams, a prominent publishing firm that also handled the resale of paintings. The firm had already purchased the painting for the then-staggering sum of five thousand dollars. The gallery charged admission to the public to view the cataract, arranged for the painting to travel in the United States and Britain, and commissioned a chromolithograph, available to the public on subscription. In December 1856, prior to the unveiling of the major painting, Church placed on view in his studio a suite of his oil sketches, including the final oil study for the Great Picture, *Horseshoe Falls* (cat. 27).²⁰ Although the mini-exhibition served as a teaser to draw attention to the main attraction, the oil sketch achieved its own recognition in the press, as one writer noted:

MR. CHURCH, as one of the results of his summer studies, exhibits a sketch of Niagara Falls, which more fully renders the "might and majesty" of this difficult subject than we ever remember to have seen these characteristics of it on canvas. . . . We shall look forward to the picture to be made from this sketch with much interest, as we believe Mr. Church intends to reproduce it on a more extended scale.²¹

Church accomplished two significant goals with the exhibition of *Niagara*. First, he maximized the press coverage of his painting by arranging for its separate display, timed to coincide with the annual exhibition at

the Academy; and second, he offered visitors to his studio an opportunity to admire the related plein-air and studio oil sketches. Neither had been done before in such a deliberate manner, and both marketing techniques would become a staple feature of Church's career. Other artists soon followed his example; the net result over the next twenty years would be the gradual erosion of the primacy of the Academy as an exhibition and sales venue and the proliferation of galleries, dealers, clubs, and studio open houses to display and sell works of art.

Unlike many of his generation, Church demonstrated an aptitude for promoting himself and employing others to help him do so. He willingly eschewed the Academy's exhibition hall in favor of commercially oriented advertising and studio events centering on a single picture. He could usually guarantee that his single work would be reviewed at some length, rather than figure as one of many mentioned in a much longer review. Although the coverage of Academy exhibitions was often extensive, journal and newspaper reviewers clearly felt obligated to provide a summary of the entire show, a task that often required two or more separate columns. Additionally, for each of his Great Pictures,²² Church arranged for a broadside, whether a single sheet or, in the case of *The Heart of the Andes*, Theodore Winthrop's forty-page pamphlet, titled *Companion to The Heart of the Andes*.²³ For this monumental painting, Church also enjoined Thomas Cole's biographer, Louis Legrand Noble, to write a shorter essay, *Church's Painting: The Heart of the Andes*. Both were retrospective travelogues guiding the viewer through the landscape much as Alexander von Humboldt had guided Church. The vicarious thrill of traveling to such exotic places became a part of the aesthetic experience not available at the Academy.

Over the course of his career, Church never sent a Great Picture to the National Academy of Design. In reserving his strongest works for the special treatment of a studio solo debut, Church opened himself to criticism for not supporting the Academy.²⁴ In fact, in 1859 while *The Heart of the Andes* was on view (for a nominal fee) in his studio, Church submitted the final oil sketch for another major work in progress, *Twilight in the Wilderness* (see fig. 80), for exhibition at the NAD.²⁵ As Church's sole contribution to that more august venue, this diminutive work was not overlooked. On the contrary, it attracted attention disproportionate to its size. *Twilight, a Sketch* (cat. 31) garnered mixed

reviews, both for its lurid palette and brevity of handling. Some critics faulted Church for slighting the NAD with a work openly titled "a sketch," a term Church did not usually favor for his exhibition pieces.²⁶ A reviewer for the *Evening Post* took a dim view of Church's decision to represent himself thus, grouching:

A sketch by Church, although possessing some strong points, is by no means worthy of the author of the "Heart of the Andes." The quality of the sky is metallic, but the cloud-forms show great study and knowledge. The composition is very simple, and the contrast of the sombre tones of the foreground with the bright hues of the sky make the sketch an effective one.²⁷

The disappointed writer's grudging concession to the sketch's effectiveness rested on appreciation of the "great study and knowledge" the artist employed in its making. Such fidelity to nature was a saving grace firmly grounded in the prevailing Ruskinian terms of the day.

For Church's part, placing his finished sketches on exhibition underscored his own belief in the quality of his smaller works, quietly affirming that the appeal of his work was not vested purely in size. In 1862 he sent a fourteen-by-sixteen-inch canvas depicting an iceberg to an artists' reception at Dodworth's Hall, attracting this favorable notice:

Such is the mastery of the forms, and greatness of feeling in the subject, that it conveys the impression of the solitary grandeur of those vast wanderers from the Polar seas, far beyond his larger and more ambitious work exhibited here last year [*The Icebergs*]. Mr. Church has rendered a great and impressive thought, and this little work bears witness to the fact that sublimity is not dependent on size.²⁸

The gradual relaxation of the idea that size equaled grandeur was an important legacy of Durand's presidency at the Academy. Frustrated though he must have been at watching Church's epics installed elsewhere, his advocacy of the oil sketch or small finished study as significant enough to warrant display in the Academy's exhibitions encouraged a growing number of artists to submit their sketches and studies for public exhibition and sale.

By contrast, Bierstadt never exhibited even his finished studies at the NAD, preferring to showcase at

that venue only his monumental efforts. Bierstadt's first Great Picture, *Lake Lucerne* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), made its debut at the NAD in April 1858 to great acclaim, at six by ten feet the largest entry in the exhibition. In scale it far surpassed John Constable's six-footers, and in ambition and intent challenged Church's newfound success. However, amid the positive notices given to *Lake Lucerne*, the reviewer for the *Crayon* sounded an early critical note, remarking, "The same ability on a smaller scale, would be more readily appreciated."²⁹ The *Crayon* reviewer likely alluded to Bierstadt's small, finished studies of Italy and Switzerland, a number of which were painted and offered for sale after he returned from Europe (see cat. 70).

Unlike Church, who showed great facility with pencil and brush early on, Bierstadt's first efforts had shown little sign of future promise. During his second year abroad he began sending finished paintings back to his hometown of New Bedford, Massachusetts, where they attracted public attention in a debate as to whether Bierstadt was capable of having painted such works unassisted. The marked improvement in his technique sparked the first of several controversies over his abilities as a painter, forcing the artist to solicit written testimonials from the leading artists in Düsseldorf as witnesses to his talent.³⁰ In this, his first experience with the mainstream art press, Bierstadt encountered suspicion that his overseas study was not enough to overcome lack of innate talent; it was a charge that would resurface later when Thomas Thompson's collection of Bierstadt's earliest work, including sketches, was sold publicly in 1870. Thompson, apparently Bierstadt's earliest admirer, had purchased many of the artist's works predating his four years in Europe, and their low quality focused attention on the inconsistencies in the now-famous artist's career. Painfully aware of how bad this looked, Bierstadt weathered public criticism of their shortcomings, his experience underscoring the reasons artists kept such works and most sketches and aborted paintings out of the public eye.³¹ As Bierstadt learned, poor sketches and unfinished works paraded before the public held the potential to do greater damage to an artist's career than the larger phenomenon of shifts of taste. Early works in particular could harm a mature artist's reputation, as the press described the pieces as "beginners' work, but containing no indication of future brilliancy."³²

Bierstadt's mature sketches seemed calculated to counter such criticism. Time and again reviewers would single out impressive numbers of preliminary oil sketches for a canvas, as if by sheer volume the sketches would validate the larger works. As a writer for the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* phrased it, "he may be regarded as the truest art-devotee who studies Nature most."³³ In this case, he who studied "most" brought back the largest number of sketches. In effect Bierstadt presented himself as a master of organization and observation, rather than intuitive genius. His paintings, then, were the result of old-fashioned hard work, embodying the "industry" he knew was often extolled in contemporary art criticism. As a marketing technique this emphasis on industry was shrewd and right on target in 1858. Before the end of his career it would be used against him, as standards of criticism shifted to extol a more suggestive and less didactic approach to painting.

Although never shy about displaying his sketches in his studio, Bierstadt was more cautious in presenting his oil sketches for sale. Like Church, he offered only those works demonstrating a more finished character, reserving the fragmented vignettes or broadly brushed plein-air landscapes for his own use. The oil sketches that Church sold were inevitably completed compositions, lacking only in size to be considered significant paintings themselves. Bierstadt's more detailed studies, especially those of individual animals and compositional features, were the ones he used the most, and they played an integral role in the creation of his easel paintings. To offer them for sale would have been counterproductive for his painting method and would too often have exposed the weaknesses inherent in his technique. Perhaps more significantly, Bierstadt's oil sketches serve as a barometer of his fortunes as a painter. His gradual willingness to place his finished sketches in exhibition halls, donate them to charity sales, and sell them outright increased with his rise to prominence. As his fortunes waned, Bierstadt used the oil sketch to attract popular attention and rejuvenate his career, a strategy in counterpoint to Church's more guarded disposition of his oil sketches in the public domain. Church carefully controlled access to his sketches, making sure their public presentation complemented his more significant paintings. As such, their availability to the public did not threaten to tarnish Church's reputation as an artist, but instead offered evidence of genius in small doses to admirers.

302
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FIG. 31 "At Home" page from the *Crayon* 2, no. 20 (14 November 1855): 302. From *The Crayon* (New York: AMS Press, 1970)

Church's decision to market his oil sketches as well as his Great Pictures signified a change in the climate of secrecy attendant on studio production. Although the process of painting was often shielded from the public, the studios themselves became more accessible as artists reaped the benefits of conducting business there. By midcentury the secrecy associated with the studio had been balanced by the artists' recognition that they could sell more paintings and accept commissions if patrons could find them there. Before long, visits to an artist's studio became a staple of doing business. By 1855 artists advertised "at home" hours in the *Crayon* to encourage visitors to call (fig. 31). The New York guidebooks of the day noted that this openness was becoming more widespread: "visitors are generally welcome to the studios of the New-York artists. We need not say that such visits serve to cultivate the tastes of those who thus spend a leisure hour, while they promote and widen true and discriminating patronage of art."³⁴



FIG. 32 Peter Juley & Sons, John F. Kensett in his studio, ca. 1864. Photographs of Artists Collection I, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Periodicals featured accounts of studio visits, frequently describing the oil sketches adorning the artist's walls: "Mr. Kensett has returned to his studio, bringing with him some fine sketches of the scenery of the White Mountains. Among these the visitor will notice particularly a Study of Rocks, with characteristic effects of the artist; a Mount Washington covered with snow, promising nobly on a larger canvas; a Landscape with a pool in the foreground, for which an order has been already given."³⁵ The sketches seen in this newly visitable world revealed previously hidden aspects of the artist's working method. The private realm of the artist's studio, once compared to an alchemist's chamber, was being transformed into a more open space, to which the public was invited for a glimpse of the apparatus of creativity.

Visiting the studio became a kind of adventure for

the viewer, who was exploring previously unknown terrain. Correspondents wrote of studio spaces as though they were points of entry into the painted locales. One writer described a visit to

Kensett's room, which is a wilderness of wildernesses. His spacious walls are covered with studies, chiefly of ravine, rock, and forest—all evincing his unwearied and successful devotion to Nature's self. Each square bit of canvas, being a faithful transcript from Nature, is a block in the foundation walls of true excellence. That he will rear a grand superstructure, cannot be doubted.³⁶

A photograph of Kensett's studio at Waverly House, at Broadway and Fourth Street (fig. 32),³⁷ shows the artist at work amid small oils, both framed and unframed, propped against the easel and other pieces of furniture. Additional sketches hung salon-style adorn the walls, primarily the artist's oil sketches of Niagara Falls (see cat. 19). Kensett's longtime friend George W. Curtis recalled, "His sketches were so vivid and faithful and delicate that afterward there was no wall in New York so beautiful as that of his old studio, . . . upon which they were hung in a solid mass."³⁸ As evidence of hard work and inspiration, the oil sketches underscored the artist's devotion to his craft; as advertisements for his potential patrons, such displays kept the sketches on view and in the public eye without the apparatus of a special event or exhibition.

Waverly House incorporated studios for several artists. Before long Dodworth's Hall, also on Broadway, joined it as a home for prominent artists, but the first building devoted to artists' studios was the Tenth Street Studio Building, also located close by. Designed by the architect Richard Morris Hunt, the building contained twenty-five studios, an exhibition space, and storage facility.³⁹ The first artists moved in during 1857 while the building was still officially under construction, and by 1859 there was a waiting list for occupants. Smaller rooms adjoining the studios often doubled as living quarters for artists reluctant to be too far from their easels. The resultant camaraderie of studio life accentuated this spirit of openness.

Church's Tenth Street studio was also the intermittent home of his friend and colleague Martin Johnson Heade. Beginning in 1866 and continuing for many of the years Church maintained space there, Heade occupied the quarters while Church was traveling, vacating

them when Church returned from his latest journey.⁴⁰ The two men shared a sense of humor predicated on puns, witty ripostes, and a sometimes sarcastic assessment of their peers. The jointly held studio was an extension of their interests and personalities, bedecked with the accumulation of props and souvenirs of distant travels. A photograph of the dark interior shows it decorated with palm fronds, enriching the tropical vision resting on Church's easel (fig. 33). In the background several of Church's oil sketches glow from the walls. Weaving together a description of the actual and painted wonders, one visitor wrote:

With Mr. Church's studio, now occupied by Mr. Heade, many of our readers are familiar. Like a recess in a woods, it appears arched and festooned by long palm-branches, whose brown, finger-like leaves depend a couple of feet or more from the curved stalks on which they grew. Multitudes of butterflies from South America glitter like blue, or scarlet, or green gems between these brown palms, and eagles' heads and stuffed cockatoos make a fit surrounding to paintings of tropical luxuriance.⁴¹

The opening of the Tenth Street Studio Building inspired the artist-residents there and in Dodworth's Hall to plan a series of artists' receptions to be held in their respective buildings. In February 1858 several of the artists renting studios in Dodworth's Hall arranged for exhibition space there to host small monthly shows of "studies from Nature, sketches in oil, water-color drawings, pencil sketches, etc., and [which] will, consequently, form a unique and peculiarly interesting exhibition."⁴² Since the number of studios in Dodworth's was small, the exhibition was open to artists with studios elsewhere.⁴³ Not only were these artists' receptions designed as a counterpoint to the more formal exhibitions at the National Academy of Design, but the installation differed from the Academy exhibitions. There, works were grouped by subject category and hung at the discretion of the hanging committee, while at the receptions, "The pictures and sketches were arranged on the sides and ends of the spacious hall, upon screens, each screen having affixed to it the name of the artist to whom it was appropriated."⁴⁴ Although more ambitious paintings were welcome, the primary emphasis remained on sketches and smaller works of art.⁴⁵ Durand, Kensett, Church, Gifford, Jasper Francis Cropsey, McEntee, and John Casilear were among the regular exhibitors, some



FIG. 33 S. Beer, stereoscopic view of Church's Tenth Street studio, showing *Rainy Season in the Tropics* on the easel (detail), ca. 1866. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1985.814

of whose small works were borrowed from collectors for the occasion.⁴⁶

The artists in the Tenth Street Studio Building held their first reception on 22 March 1858, ten days after the final reception of the season at Dodworth's. The exhibition filled the central reception hall, and most of the twenty-five artists opened their individual studios. The receptions proved so successful that by the end of 1859 the residents of both buildings formed a joint Artists' Reception Committee boasting sixty members including Gifford, Emanuel Leutze, and Bierstadt. The organization had its own constitution, stipulating three receptions each year at Dodworth's Hall in January, February, and March, and a single Tenth Street Studio Building reception a few weeks after the March open house at Dodworth's.⁴⁷

Some of the early press coverage focused on the social aspect of these events. The Tenth Street Studio Building reception of March 1860 was described as providing

refined and intellectual communion which is nowhere to be found in greater perfection than at those pleasant parties. Perhaps, indeed, there is no *salon* of New York from which the cosmopolitan tone of its society can be better inferred than

from these artistic assemblies, in which its best social components are brought together and made conspicuous in a manner at once agreeable and constructive.⁴⁸

However, what sustained these receptions year after year was the volume of sales they generated. A report covering the Dodworth's reception for January 1861 opened with the statement,

The first "Artists' reception" of the season was given in Dodworth's Hall on the evening of January 16th. It was brilliantly attended by the *elite* and art-patrons of the metropolis, and proved, we are happy to hear, quite a success in a material point of view—nearly one half the pictures on exhibition being selected for purchase by the visitors. . . . The query is often asked, particularly by the ladies, how to get an invitation to these exclusive and *recherché* artists' receptions. We will tell you *ma et mon ami*. Just buy one or two pictures at the *habitats* of Dodworth or the Tenth street building, and an invitation will be sure to follow.⁴⁹

What had begun as a forum for displaying sketches and other informal works of art had now matured into an alternative exhibition space, a legitimate rival to the NAD and a suitable replacement for the defunct American Art-Union. The artists had begun to assert stronger control over their patronage, rewarding loyal collectors and inspiring competition among would-be clients for favored status. Attendance was considered tantamount to admission to the hallowed halls of taste, underscored by the language of the press coverage.

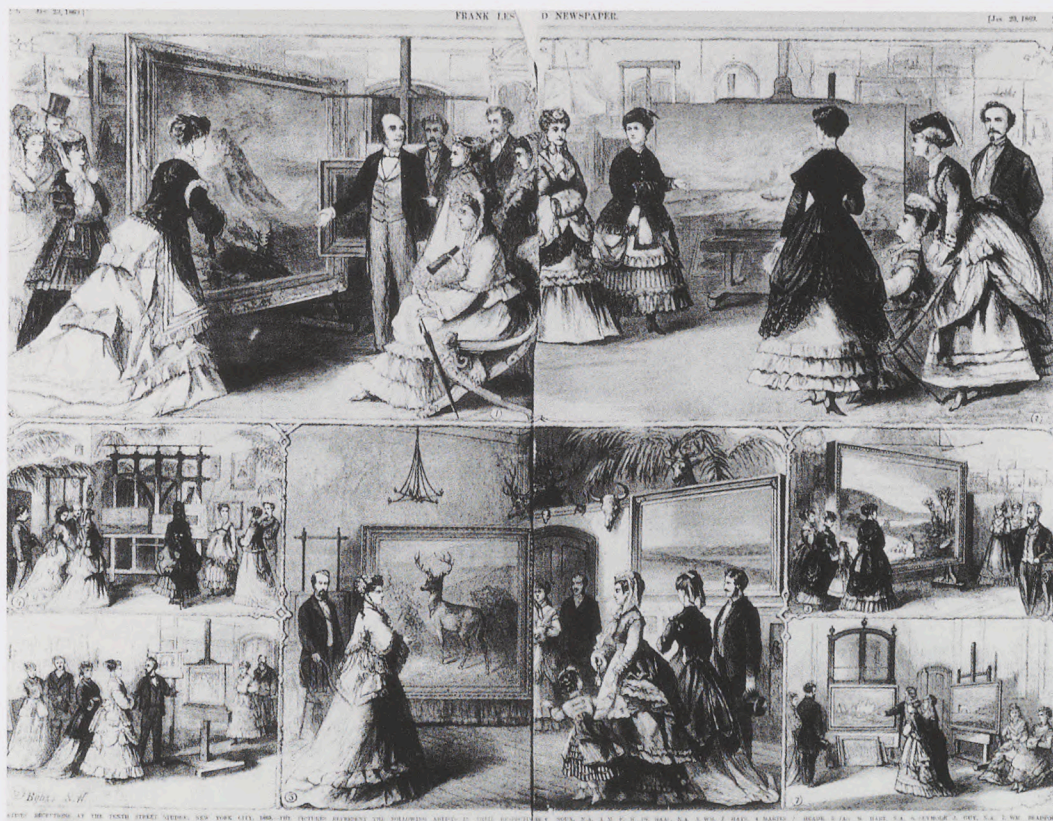
Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper* of 29 January 1869 provides a glimpse of these events' continuing popularity, as crowds of viewers examine walls hung to the ceiling with small works of art (fig. 34). The double-page illustration depicts the interiors of seven studios of prominent artists residing in the Tenth Street Studio Building, including Church's (identified as Heade's), in which palm fronds complemented his latest tropical view. Other studio interiors include framed and unframed sketches hanging salon-style, providing a visually concentrated backdrop to the larger works on the easels. Artists used the receptions to encourage individual studio visits during which they could discuss potential commissions at greater leisure.

With the establishment of the Tenth Street Studio

Building and Dodworth's Hall, artists had created communal places in which they lived and worked. Personal decoration vied with utilitarian features to create a strange hybrid of public and private space, functioning as both salon and refuge. As a meeting ground between artist and patron, the studio in some way had to match the social level of the artist's patrons.⁵⁰ In 1885 a writer for the *Century Illustrated Monthly* observed, "So varied is the environment with which artists love to surround themselves that one is tempted to ask for a new definition of the word studio. . . . In the city he often yields to the temptation of a *show* studio, a museum of rare bric-a-brac and artful effects of interior decoration; in the country he surrounds himself rather with the necessary condition of *work*."⁵¹

A show studio in New York was an effective way to monitor privacy and enhance public exposure, both of which were important to the artist. In 1875 Bierstadt took over the exhibition hall in the Tenth Street Studio Building, which would later attain lasting notoriety as William Merritt Chase's salon. After he had modified the hall by adding viewing balconies to accommodate distant perspectives similar to what was available in his country studio and home, Malkasten, Bierstadt used the space to unveil paintings.⁵² Ironically, Bierstadt's studios tended to become larger and more elaborately decorated as his fortunes waned. In December 1875 the artist threw one of his occasional parties, catered by Delmonico's, to fête clients and friends.⁵³ Having been introduced to an aristocratic and international group of art and nature enthusiasts (including the earl of Dunraven, Queen Victoria, and the Russian Grand Duke Alexis), Bierstadt found himself trying to keep pace with an expensive lifestyle just as the market for his Great Pictures began to dry up. His descent into personal bankruptcy by 1895 may in part be attributed to this attempt to match the generosity of his hosts. In this respect he differed little from Chase, who used his elaborate display of studio accoutrements to divert attention from his shaky finances. In the words of John Moran, "The studio of an artist, as a general thing, is rather the index (though by no means a certain one) to his intellectual leanings and particular tastes, than to the state of his finances."⁵⁴ Bierstadt's struggle to maintain the trappings of success while staving off bankruptcy must have imposed a severe burden on his time and finances, a situation to which he was understandably reluctant publicly to admit.

FIG. 34 "Receptions at the Tenth Street Studios, 1869," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 29 January 1869. © Museum of the City of New York. Caption at bottom reads: 1869: above left, Regis Gignoux; above right, Maurice F. H. de Haas; center left, Martin J. Heade; center, William J. Hays; center right, James M. Hart; below left, Seymour J. Guy; and below right, William Bradford



Bierstadt filled both his home and studio with the souvenirs of his travels, especially Indian artifacts and mounted game animals. In 1860 a reviewer delighted in visiting the artist's studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building, recording, "In Bierstadt's room were a good many evidences of his Indian and prairie studies in the shape of buffalo skins and other articles of border life."⁵⁵ In 1879 Bierstadt moved his studio to the Rensselaer Building, and by 1891 he had taken a studio in the Dime Savings Bank on lower Broadway.⁵⁶ The following year a visitor to this studio remarked, "the large studio is a curious place. With its great number of stuffed animals—moose, reindeer, seal, bear, you might imagine you were in a menagerie. . . . A collection of Indian baskets and straw work is a feature, so also are two great doors, divided into panels to hold paintings."⁵⁷ A photograph of the space, published in 1891, provides a glimpse of the studio interior (fig. 35). Two stuffed mountain goats, which were the subject of one of his paintings, are perched on pedestals, and a moose head is mounted on the wall. Bierstadt's collection of trophy heads served the same purpose as his oil sketches and his other mementos of travel: to impress visitors with his exploits and to provide inspiration for his next painting.

His oil sketches, mounted in wooden panels, decorated the entire height of the studio: the large-scale

oil-on-paper works were set into one wall, and the smaller, fourteen-by-nineteen-inch sketches filled several others. Small oil sketches littered the floor and were stacked against all available surfaces; more sketches hung on the wall in gilded frames along with larger works. The enormity of Bierstadt's output is nowhere more evident than in the clutter of his studio, where the visitor came away with the perception of having seen hundreds of sketches, the sheer number of them suggesting the impressive lengths to which an artist would go to bring "truth" back from his travels. Left unchecked, an artist surrounded by oil sketches and the inevitable array of souvenirs ran the risk of distracting his visitor rather than providing a climate conducive to commissioning a work of art. Still, press coverage featured lengthy descriptions of such embellished spaces, passing swiftly over more austere environments.

Press reports and public exhibitions were not the only avenue for an artist in search of attention to his oil sketches. Some artists engaged professional writers to accompany them on far-flung trips for the purpose of recording each day's events, in particular plein-air oil sketching. Louis Legrand Noble went to Labrador in 1859 with Church, and they collaborated on Noble's *After Icebergs with a Painter*, a book illustrated with lithographs after Church's oil sketches. Noble's task was



FIG. 35 Albert Bierstadt's studio in the Dime Savings Bank, lower Broadway, ca. 1891.

to record Church's "season among the icebergs, in which he was again discoverer, pioneer, conqueror."⁵⁸ The artist's timing was impeccable. Interest in this region had been stimulated when the British Royal Navy acknowledged the disappearance of Sir John Franklin and his crew in 1847, lost while searching for the Northwest Passage. The search for Franklin had all the earmarks of a valiant rescue and a romantic quest for personal and national acclaim in a region presenting a frontier of unknown proportions and chilling prospects, literally and psychologically. Noble gave a capsule summary of the obstacles, noting,

If one is curious about the troubles of painting on a little coaster, lightly ballasted, dashing forward frequently under a press of sail, with a short sea, I would recommend him to a good, stout swing. While in the enjoyment of his smooth and sickening vibrations, let him spread out his pallet [*sic*], arrange his canvas, and paint a pair of colts at their gambols in some adjacent field.⁵⁹

The principal hardships Church and Noble encountered around Labrador were the cold and seasickness. Like flies and mosquitoes, they were more nuisances than threats, although Noble did point out the difficulties of sketching while queasy, providing sympathetic insight to an all-too-common affliction. One of Church's most stringent challenges would be to render the stark, float-

ing world of the Arctic in a manner comprehensible to an audience that had never made the trip. Labrador's bleak landscape tested Church's abilities to render the refractory capabilities of water, ice, and sky, and tested as well the strength of his stomach and his endurance for chilly sketching conditions (see cats. 32, 33).

Noble's book-length narrative served as Church's advance publicity for the expected Great Picture. The thinly veiled references to the artist "C———" fooled no one, which was the point entirely; Church's whereabouts were carefully recounted in the New York press, and notices anticipating the completion of *The Icebergs* removed any lingering ambiguity. More important, Noble defined Church's mission in Canada as a quest for "the rarest specimen of our luck preserved in oil and colors, a method peculiar to those few, who intend their articles less for the market than for immortality."⁶⁰ The chase and capture of plein-air oil sketches catapulted the artist's efforts into the realm of hyperbole. Without these trophies won in the field, the artist's studio efforts were merely mortal.

Noble's bold statement affirmed the importance of the sketches painted at firsthand to the development of whatever major painting would follow. Of greater significance was his identification of the plein-air oil sketch as a singularly important goal of the artist's mission: artistic immortality. Such a declaration, coming from such an august source as Noble, Thomas Cole's pastor

and biographer, had the desired effect on the critics, who could not wait to praise Church's fortitude, writ large, as it were, in small oils. Church unveiled *The Icebergs* (see fig. 23) at Goupil's in April 1861, while one of his preliminary oil sketches hung in the Tenth Street studio of his close friend, the sculptor Launt Thompson. A reviewer who preferred the oil sketch wrote, "It is more simple, more grand, and more impressive [than *The Icebergs*]. How true it is, that the slight sketch or study direct from nature, is more worthy than the elaborated works on the easel."⁶¹ The critical attention lavished by Noble on Church's oil sketches assured that the opening of his portfolio would be an event richly anticipated by the New York art world.

Church well understood that the value of many of his oil sketches resided in the aura of danger and triumph of character exemplified in the act of sketching under difficult circumstances. On his return from Palestine in 1868, aware that his being allowed to sketch undisturbed at Petra was an unusual and daring feat, Church knew his sketches were proof that he had successfully met that challenge. Whatever paintings he might make from his works would pale in light of the very existence of the original sketches. Writing to William H. Osborn from Egypt, Church had made this plain:

It does seem a pity to spend the time in indoor work which might be employed securing in *color* the splendors of the Khasne, the Sik, &c. which makes Petra so marvellously splendid. My sketches in a pecuniary point of view would be worth more than the two pictures I might paint at Beyrout. . . . Just think of a series of studies in oil presenting the great features of Thebes, &c., Sinai, Petra, Palmyra, Damascus, Baalbek, Lebanon, Jerusalem, &c., &c. !!!⁶²

Church's intention to market his oil sketches, likely through public exhibition and quite possibly through selected sales, marks a change in attitude indelibly distinct from the traditional view of oil sketches as private *aides-mémoires*. As had been the case in the Arctic, Church valued his portfolio as more than raw material for easel paintings. In his working method these sketches had artistic merit warranting their public display and could be counted on to attract commissions and add to his reputation as an artist-explorer.

Church's flair for the dramatic was not restricted to descriptions of far-off places. On a return visit to

Niagara Falls in 1858, Church sketched from the deck of the *Maid of the Mist*. There he commandeered the small vessel to sketch the cataract head-on. An account of this event appeared in the Albany newspaper three years later as the immense finished painting titled *Under Niagara* (unlocated) went on view in the neighboring city of Troy. The writer's description of the artist's exploits further enhanced Church's reputation as a master artist and daredevil:

[*Under Niagara*] was painted from studies made on board the steamer *Maid of the Mist*, when she plied between the bridge and Niagara Falls. Mr. C having chartered the boat, required it to be propelled to a point in the foaming waters almost underneath the cataract, and by great effort, it was made to remain, rolling and toiling, *three quarters of an hour*, where it had never remained before a single minute.⁶³

One of the oil sketches Church painted from this trip (cat. 30) went on view in the artist's studio, a fitting trophy from his latest adventure. The enlarged version, measuring four by six feet, attracted its own attention through reports that Church had painted the Great Picture in a single day. This enormous canvas shared its rapid execution and presumably vibrantly painted surface with the much smaller plein-air oil sketch. That *Under Niagara* was immediately sold for five thousand dollars and then displayed at Goupil's in December 1862 is proof of what Gerald Carr has called "easily the most overt demonstration of pure technical virtuosity in his oeuvre,"⁶⁴ and further indication that the market was becoming more receptive to the aesthetic power of the painted sketch.

Bierstadt had observed the success attendant on Church's exhibited works, which from the start were accompanied by written matter praising the artist's painted accomplishments as well as his daring exploits in the field. The writer Fitz Hugh Ludlow accompanied Bierstadt on his second trip west in 1863, the artist's first trip to California. Ludlow first published his account in a series of letters in the *New York Evening Post*, then the following year in expanded form as a series of lengthy articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* and in the California periodical the *Golden Era*.⁶⁵ Ludlow's presence guaranteed Bierstadt the kind of coverage Noble had provided for Church, emphasizing the artist's fortitude and skill, priming his home audience for the painted wonders to follow. Ludlow would chronicle

their adventures, recounting hardships and humorous anecdotes, liberally sprinkled with descriptions of Bierstadt's working method on the frontier. Such self-promotion using references to fieldwork would help buoy a rising tide of interest in oil sketches on the part of the public, who were encouraged to believe that the making of art was exciting and sometimes dangerous.

Prints were a popular form of artistic illustration. In the tradition of gift books and ladies' albums, engravings and lithographs expanded the middle-class market for art and broadened an artist's following to a larger stratum of society.⁶⁶ The success of such impressive volumes as *The Home Book of the Picturesque* encouraged the proliferation of gift books with bound-in engravings and individually published prints after paintings and sketches. In 1852 John Kensett provided illustrations to be engraved in George W. Curtis's volume *Lotos-Eating: A Summer Book*, a tour of resorts representing another popular literary and pictorial genre.⁶⁷ Kensett's friendship with Curtis, who was editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, provided him the kind of access to a broad audience that Ludlow provided Bierstadt, and Noble, Church. An engraver by training, Kensett could ensure that his sketches were appropriate for the craftsman who would translate his work with the burin.

Travel-related articles in the popular periodicals also featured anecdotal accounts of artists' trips in search of sketches. In 1877 Church helped organize a trip to Maine with fellow artists Sanford Gifford, Lockwood deForest, and several others on an excursion to Mount Katahdin. The following year, one member of the group published a fond recollection of the month-

long sketching trip to the Maine woods in *Scribner's Monthly*.⁶⁸ Their activity pointed up the high level of artistic camaraderie that was a cherished component of such ventures.⁶⁹ Five of Church's oil sketches served as the basis for engravings illustrating the article, including *Night View of the Camp* (figs. 36, 37). For the reader, the engraved sketches had the effect of welcoming the outsider to a place near the campfire, part of the informal atmosphere of such a trip. As a marketing tool for the artists, it served much the same purpose as Church's initial foray into the medium, made nearly thirty years earlier.

The public appetite for accounts of artists' travels remained strong through the 1870s, encouraging Ludlow to reissue in expanded form his articles from his trip with Bierstadt. For *The Heart of the Continent* Ludlow arranged to have some of Bierstadt's oil sketches engraved as illustrations, despite the fact that the two men were no longer on speaking terms.⁷⁰ Ludlow matched sketches with descriptions of the artist at work and with signal events of the overland journey. Near Fort Kearney, Nebraska, Bierstadt had watched two buffalo calves, or as Ludlow described it, "our artist held two *seances* with the little creatures on the afternoon of our arrival and the next morning, transferring them to canvas in every variety of attitude and getting their *animus* and typical distinctions as well by heart as he had succeeded in doing with their belligerent sires."⁷¹ In the oil sketch (fig. 38) Bierstadt painted a frieze of partially visualized and complete calves, which was then manipulated to create the charming vignette engraved for Ludlow's book (fig. 39).



FIG. 36 Frederic Edwin Church, *Campfire near Mount Katahdin*, ca. 1877. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1980.1916.A

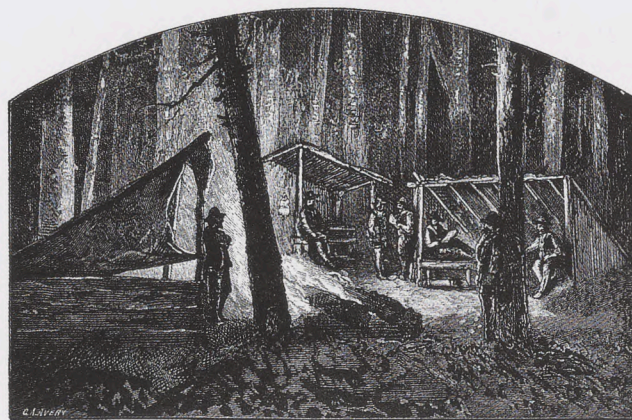


FIG. 37 George A. Avery, after Frederic Edwin Church, *Night View of the Camp*, 1877. Wood engraving, image, 2 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 4 $\frac{7}{16}$ in. From *Arbor Ilex* [A. L. Holley], "Camps and Tramps about Ktaadn," *Scribner's Monthly* 16 (May–October 1878): 35

FIG. 38 Albert Bierstadt, *Buffalo Calves*. Oil on paper, 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 18 in. National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson, Wyoming



FIG. 39 After Albert Bierstadt, *Buffalo Calves*. Wood engraving. From Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), opp. 85



Bierstadt's oil sketches of individual animals and small, carefully composed landscapes were well suited for the engraver and added to the artist's growing reputation as an authority on the American West. Prominent among the books written about travel in the West is Arthur Pendarves Vivian's book *Wanderings in the Western Land*, published in 1879. Vivian was the earl of Dunraven's brother-in-law; this arrangement continued a relationship Bierstadt began during his trip with the earl to Estes Park, Colorado, in 1876. In his preface Vivian credited Bierstadt with placing "his original oil sketches at my disposal" from which he arranged to have the engravings made.⁷² The majority of these sketches were animal studies, including buffalo, pronghorn antelope, and elk, along with several landscapes featuring animals in their natural habitat (see cat. 85).

Although Bierstadt enjoyed a period of great success with patrons and critics in the East, it was in the West that he received the lion's share of favorable attention directed to his oil sketches. California would provide Bierstadt with more than a second home and studio; it gave him a second audience whose more relaxed acceptance of the oil sketch matched its enthusiasm for his larger canvases. Renting a studio in San Francisco while he and Ludlow continued up the coast to Washington State, the artist left on display some of his oil sketches that caught the eye of one California reviewer:

Bierstadt has gone to Oregon. He has left here, temporarily, the result of his labors in the Yosemite, in a portfolio of sketches in color. When we reflect that

great pictures are rarer luxuries than great books . . . we can understand the rare privilege of those who have been permitted to look upon these perfect germs of great masterpieces. We hazard nothing in saying this.⁷³

An unnamed reviewer hailing from New Bedford contributed a notice to the *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, his own thoughts reinforcing the generally high praise for Bierstadt's works in progress:

I had the great pleasure of seeing most of his new sketches. They are charming, grand and glorious—some of them exquisite pictures *now*, and, if I am not much mistaken, when put upon canvass [*sic*], will astonish the world. A friend went with me, and in a few minutes, ordered a picture. I confess, I felt, as I stood there, while Bierstadt was modestly talking and turning over his sketches, mighty proud of our New Bedford artist, destined, I believe, to outrank all others.⁷⁴

One sketch in particular, of the North Dome in Yosemite, attracted specific mention in two separate notices in the *Golden Era*, which praised both its fidelity and Bierstadt's ability to render the atmosphere—the

sense of being there—that escaped so many photographs taken of the region.⁷⁵ Under the pseudonym Inigo, Charles Henry Webb, the California correspondent for the *New York Times*, wrote:

Quite by accident I happened to obtain a glimpse of his Yosemite sketches. . . . I have been unable to get them out of my mind ever since. He has fairly led the Valley away captive. For his sketch of "The Dome," I would give more than I would for any finished picture that San Francisco contains. Sketches, did I say—they are not sketches, nor are they studies—they are pictures, and need but frames and the faintest re-touch to entitle them to a place in any gallery.⁷⁶

Praising Bierstadt's ability to paint each feature of the landscape with the illusion of reality, Webb concluded, "I do not think I ever in my life saw so perfect a reproduction of nature as Bierstadt has here achieved."

Returning to California in July 1871 Bierstadt spent the better part of two years on the West Coast. In the fall of 1872 he built a studio high on a hill in San Francisco in which to spend the winter.⁷⁷ One of the canvases on his easel was a view of Donner Pass, based on sketches made in the company of Collis Huntington during the summer of 1871.⁷⁸ The papers had delighted in reporting that the artist was rumored to have arisen "morning after morning at four o'clock, until he had secured the desired effect of light and shade and color."⁷⁹ One of the finished studies from this excursion is *View of Donner Lake, California* (fig. 40). Painted in oil on paperboard, measuring 29¼ by 21⅞ inches, it is one of many such large-scale studies, most of them conforming roughly to these dimensions.⁸⁰ Although the artist certainly could have painted them on site, it is more likely, given the impressive amount of pictorial detail they contain, that these larger oil sketches were completed back in the studio. As finished sketches these achieved a compromise between the diminutive scale of the majority of the artist's plein-air sketches and his monumental canvases. The paper support served an economic purpose, providing a less expensive surface on which to experiment before committing paint to canvas for a Great Picture. For an artist lacking independent means, it was a method whereby he could work up a composition at minimal expense. Even so, many of Bierstadt's mammoth oil sketches were signed and dated, characteristic more of the artist's easel paintings than his fieldwork.



FIG. 40 Albert Bierstadt, *View of Donner Lake, California*, 1871–72. Oil on paperboard, 29¼ × 21⅞ in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Anna Bennett and Jessie Jonas in memory of August F. Jonas, Jr., 1984.⁵⁴

Public admiration for an artist's oil sketches arose in tandem with the opportunities collectors and critics had to view them. Bierstadt discovered that patrons on both coasts found merit in these smaller, more direct paintings. In large part, the social interaction within an artist's studio did as much to encourage the growth of the art market as the exhibitions at the NAD and AA-U. As artists learned to promote their own works independent of the Academy, their studios gradually took on the trappings of an independent gallery. The artists' receptions offered the most significant alternative to the Academy as a venue for the display and sale of paintings, complemented by the artists' willingness to engage in such marketing techniques. Creating events featuring a single canvas or a teaser for the next Great Picture, Church and Bierstadt helped alter the landscape of patronage and the viewing of art during the 1850s and 1860s.⁸¹

Church's use of Williams, Stevens, & Williams and Goupil's paved the way for other artists to avail them-

selves of these intermediaries. By 1871 Gifford had begun using private galleries to handle his sales.⁸² Commensurate with these changes was the shift away from an earlier era of public patronage through institutions like the NAD and AA-U. Increased independence from these venues encouraged artists to exert greater control over the display and sale of their works, through direct sales and the growing number of dealers opening galleries during the latter part of the century. Commercial galleries had the advantage of taking on consignment paintings that had made their debut earlier and had not yet sold, relieving the artist of the burden of storage of older works. By 1877, when the rival Society of American Artists (SAA) was founded, art exhibitions and sales took place at numerous venues around the city, and under a variety of auspices. Commercial galleries, private dealers, private clubs, the SAA, and entrepreneurial artists chipped away at the Academy's hegemony, expanding the art market as they broadened the definition of an exhibitible work of art.

NOTES

1. William Cullen Bryant was appointed the first president of the AA-U in 1844. He wrote editorials for the *New York Post*, attended meetings of the NAD, and eventually held elective office there; he socialized at the Sketch Club and was a founding member of the Century Association.
2. Gilmore to Cole, 24 May 1828; quoted in *Annual II: Studies on Thomas Cole, an American Romanticist* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1967), 59.
3. For a complete list of Durand's submissions to the Academy exhibitions, see M. Bartlett Cowdrey, comp., *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826-1860*, 2 vols. (New York: printed for the New-York Historical Society, 1948); and Maria Naylor, comp., *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1861-1900*, 2 vols. (New York: Kennedy Galleries, 1973). For a list of Durand's submissions to the American Art-Union exhibitions, see M. Bartlett Cowdrey, Theodore Sizer, et al., *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union Exhibition Record, 1816-1852*, 2 vols. (New York: printed for the New-York Historical Society, 1953).
4. David B. Lawall, *Asher B. Durand: Documentary Catalogue of the Narrative and Landscape Paintings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 215-20.
5. "The Fine Arts. The National Academy. A First View. Durand and the Landscapes," *Literary World* 6 (27 April 1850): 424.
6. *Literary World* 6 (7 April 1850): 424.
7. Durand's feeling for the spiritual potency of the wild or rural landscape took its cue from Cole's conclusion that "the wilderness is YET a fitting place to speak of God." Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," reprinted in John McCoubrey, ed., *American Art, 1700-1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 100.
8. "Sketchings," *Crayon* 1, no. 7 (25 April 1855): 267.
9. Ila Weiss notes that this is the earliest reference to outdoor work in Gifford's fledgling career. Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 63.
10. Kensett to J. W. Moore, 7 December 1848, American Art-Union Papers, The New-York Historical Society; Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union Exhibition Records*, 213. Kensett lists a painting of this title in his account book for 1848 as having sold for \$50. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA), reel N68-85, frames 465-88.
11. Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union Exhibition Record*, 213. Both paintings appear in Kensett's account book for 1849, as having been sold to the AA-U for \$40 and \$50, respectively. AAA, reel N68-85, frames 465-88.
12. "Fine Arts. The Kensett Collection of Pictures," *Arcadian* 1, no. 27 (20 March 1873): 10.
13. Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union Exhibition Record*, 70; also cited in Franklin Kelly and Gerald L. Carr,

The Early Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church, 1845–1854 (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1987), 97 n. 1.

14. *New York Evening Mirror*, 29 November 1848, 2; quoted in Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1:135.

15. Cowdrey, *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826–1860*, 80; also cited in Kelly and Carr, *The Early Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*, 97 n. 1. Ironically, when Church exhibited *Above the Clouds at Sunrise* in 1849, reviewers deemed it a study and not a finished picture, perhaps due to its less overt narrative structure and more apparent effect of sunlight on clouds. Certainly the focal point of the painting is an effect of the weather and not the topography or human activity in the landscape. Cited in Carr, *Olana*, 1:152 n. 3.

16. [Frederic Church], "Mountain Views and Coast Scenery, by a Landscape Painter," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* (November 1850): 130.

17. David C. Huntington first identified Church as the article's author and linked it to his exhibited sketches. Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826–1900: Painter of the Adamic New World Myth" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1960), 24–27. One assumes that Church's friends and colleagues knew he had spent the summer in Maine and therefore that he was a logical candidate to be the article's author and subject.

18. Cowdrey, *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826–1860*, 1:80.

19. *New York Daily Tribune*, 10 May 1851, 5; quoted in Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church," 24–27.

20. *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 2 December 1856, 2; quoted in Carr, *Olana*, 1:232 n. 4.

21. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 4, no. 2 (February 1857): 54.

22. For a thorough definition and discussion of the Great Picture in England and America, see Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: The Icebergs* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1980), 21–30.

23. Winthrop's essay was reprinted posthumously as a chapter in his book, *Life in the Open Air, and Other Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863).

24. McEntee felt bitterly about Church's independence, fuming, "He is an academician. He does nothing for the Academy but criticise it. Wont [*sic*] accept any office, wont exhibit his pictures but each year while the Academy exhibition is going on brings out a picture at Goupils. I wonder what policy he would call that. I am getting pretty sick of this sort of thing and hope he wont present me with an opportunity to say what I think of it." McEntee's diary, entry for 18 April 1875; AAA, reel D180.

25. Cowdrey, *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826–1860*, 1:81.

26. Carr, *Olana*, 1:255.

27. "National Academy of Design. Thirty-fourth Exhibition," *New York Evening Post*, 14 May 1859, 1.

28. *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 8 January 1862, 1; quoted in Gerald L. Carr, "Beyond the Tip: Some Addenda to Frederic Church's *The Icebergs*," *Arts Magazine* 56 (November 1981): 110.

29. *Crayon* (May 1858): 147; quoted in Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990), 123.

30. A letter signed by Andreas Achenbach, Friedrich Lessing, Emanuel Leutze, and Whittredge (among others) averred the authenticity of Bierstadt's paintings, settling the controversy and calming the artist's mother, whose concern for her son's reputation prompted the affidavit from Düsseldorf. The letter fragment is in the Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera. See Whittredge, "The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge, 1820–1910," ed. John I. H. Baur, *Brooklyn Museum Journal* 1 (1942): 27; see also Bierstadt chronology in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, esp. 118–19.

31. *Catalogue of the Thomas Thompson Collection Auction* (New York: Leeds Art Galleries, 1870); Richard Trump, "Life and Works of Albert Bierstadt" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1963), 25.

32. *New York Tribune*, 29 January 1870. Bierstadt tried to exchange two of his later works for all the early ones in the Thompson collection in an effort to keep them out of the sale, to no avail. *New York Times*, 31 January 1870; both quoted in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 188.

33. "Our Artists and Their Whereabouts," *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 2 (September 1858): 209.

34. C. S. Francis, *Francis's New Guide to the Cities of New-York and Brooklyn* (New York, 1853), 79; quoted in John K. Howat, "A Climate for Landscape Painters," in Howat et al., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 55.

35. "Fine Art Gossip," *Literary World*, no. 200 (30 November 1850): 433.

36. "Studios of American Artists," *Home Journal*, 26 January 1856.

37. Waverly House was built in 1851. Thomas P. Rossiter had a studio there 1851–53; Kensett remained there until 1870; John Casilear maintained a studio there 1854–56. Annette Blaugrund, "The Tenth Street Studio Building" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1987), 42–44. See also Blaugrund, "The Evolution of American Artists' Studios, 1740–1860," *Antiques* 141, no. 1 (January 1992): 214–25.

38. George W. Curtis, "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 46 (March 1873): 611–12; reprinted in The Century Association, *Proceedings at a Meeting of the Century Association Held in Memory of John F. Kensett* (New York, December 1872), 24–29.

39. Blaugrund's dissertation, "The Tenth Street Studio Building," remains the most extensive discussion of the building, its tenants, and the evolution of American artists' studios during the nineteenth century.

40. Church kept his Tenth Street studio until 1889, although by 1870 he had all but moved permanently to Olana. See the roster of Tenth Street tenants in Annette Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists* (Southampton, N.Y.: The Parrish Art Museum, 1997), 133–34.

41. "The Arts: At the Studios," *Appleton's* (27 March 1875): 410. Tuckerman also mentions tropical butterflies under glass in Church's studio, in Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1867), 378–79.

42. "Sketchings. Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 5, no. 1 (January 1858): 23.

43. Blaugrund has identified 11 artists with studios in Dodworth's Hall during 1854–55. Blaugrund, "The Tenth Street Studio Building," 41.

44. *Crayon* 5, no. 2 (February 1858): 59.

45. Gifford showed an oil sketch titled *The Castle at Chillon* at the February 1860 reception at Dodworth's and a "finished study" titled *The Wilderness* at the April 1860 reception. The latter was mentioned in a review in the *Crayon* 7 (May 1860): 113.

46. "The Artists' Reception," *Crayon* 5, no. 4 (April 1858): 114, lists the availability of Cropsey's studies from nature "through the kindness of Mess. S. P. Avery and G. Vanderlipp." For the March 1859 Dodworth's reception, "Casilear sent two fine sketches of Swiss scenery. . . . Durand contributed two studies from nature . . . Cropsey by two characteristic sketches . . . and, finally, we would mention a sketch by Cole called 'Salvator Rosa sketching Banditti.'" *Crayon* 6, no. 3 (March 1859): 93.

47. Bierstadt and Gifford were among the signatories on 8 December. *Crayon* 7 (January–February 1860): 25, 56–57. Also cited in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 146.

48. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 7, no. 4 (April 1860): 113.

49. "Art Gossip," *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 5 (March 1861): 37.

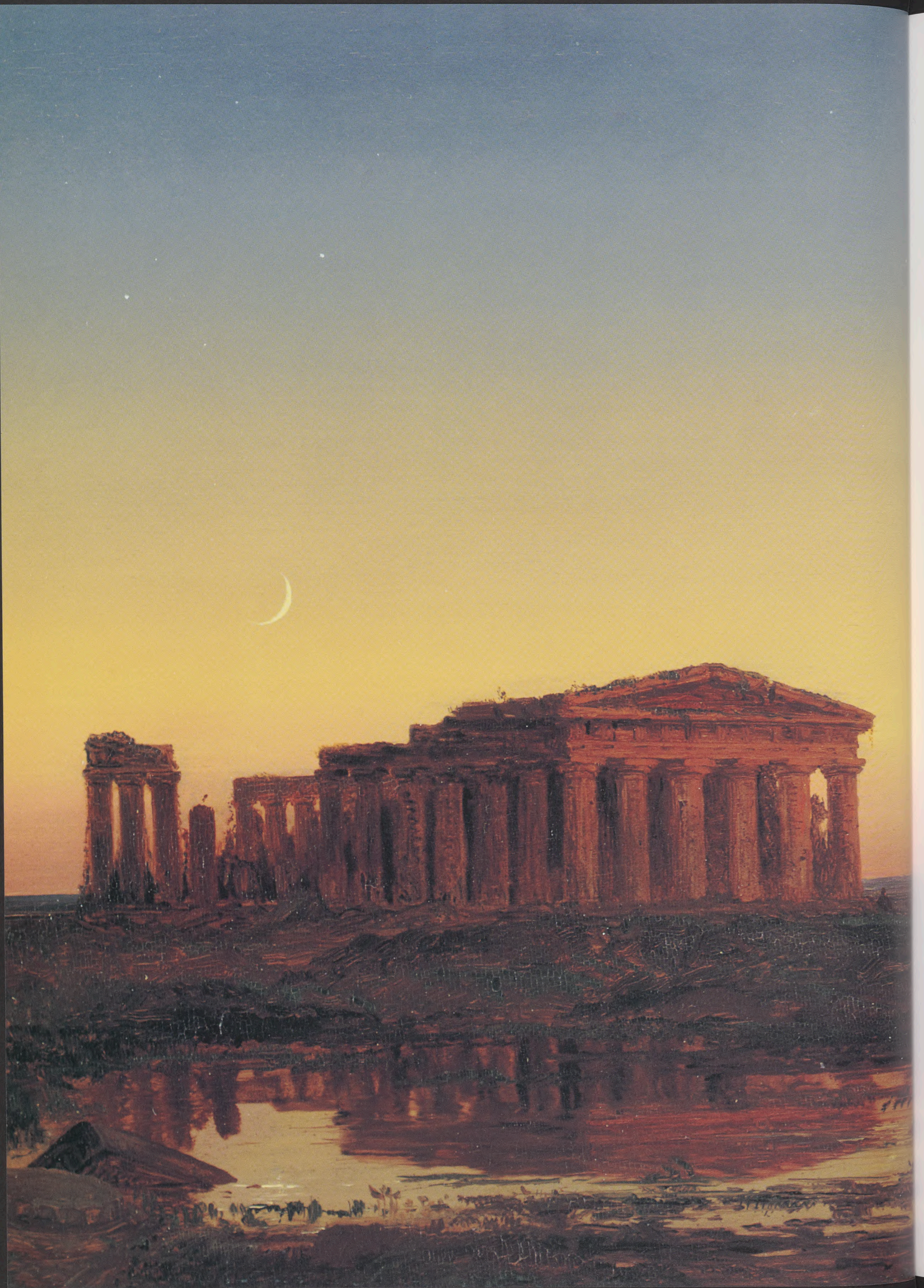
50. Blaugrund examines this phenomenon in Europe and America in detail in "The Tenth Street Studio Building," esp. chap. 7 and appendix D.

51. Lizzie W. Champney, "The Summer Haunts of American Artists," *Century Illustrated Monthly* 30 (May–October 1885): 846; quoted in Blaugrund, "The Tenth Street Studio Building," 422–23.

52. *Ibid.*, 144.

53. McEntee's diary, entry for Thursday, 30 December 1875, AAA, reel D180; quoted in Garnett McCoy, ed., "Jervis McEntee's Diary," *Archives of American Art Journal* 8, nos. 3–4 (July–October 1968): 18. Bierstadt

- held another party catered by Delmonico's barely a month later, on 25 January 1876, to woo the earl of Dunraven as a client. See Trump, "Life and Works of Albert Bierstadt," 171.
54. John Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," *Art Journal* (New York) 5 (1879): 343.
55. *New York Tribune*, 20 January 1860; quoted in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 145.
56. See Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building*, 126 n. 2. Meant to be temporary, the Broadway studio was located on the second floor of the Dime Savings Bank, at Thirty-second Street and Broadway. Ishmael, "Through the New York Studios," *Illustrated American* 6, no. 57 (21 March 1891): 245.
57. "New York Gossip. Albert Bierstadt's Picture, *The Landing of Columbus*. A Favored Few Permitted to Gaze upon the Canvas," *Detroit Free Press*, 15 May 1892.
58. Henry Ward French, *Art and Artists in Connecticut* (New York: Charles T. Dillingham, 1879), 130.
59. Louis Legrand Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter: A Summer Voyage to Labrador and around Newfoundland* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1979), 83.
60. *Ibid.*, 4.
61. *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 18 June 1861; quoted in Carr, *The Icebergs*, 97 n. 2.
62. Church to Osborn, Alexandria, 6 January 1868. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, David C. Huntington Archives.
63. *Albany Evening Journal*, 18 May 1863, 2; quoted in Carr, *Olana*, 1:250.
64. *Ibid.*, 273.
65. For this trip to California, Bierstadt intended to assemble a group of Louis Agassiz's students to accompany him: a botanist, a zoologist, a geologist, and a paleontologist. Letter from Bierstadt to Edwin M. Stanton (secretary of war), 8 April 1862, National Archives; quoted in Nancy K. Anderson, "Albert Bierstadt: The Path to California, 1830-1874" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1985), 180-82. Ludlow would describe his scientific comrades' activities as "Agassizing, so to speak," in "Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite," *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (June 1864): 749.
66. See Helen Wright, "Bierstadt and the Business of Printmaking," in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 273.
67. George W. Curtis, *Lotos-Eating: A Summer Book* (New York: Harper & Bros., Publishers, 1852). See Kenneth Myers, *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820-1895* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987), 160 n. 12.
68. Arbor Ilex [A. L. Holley], "Camps and Tramps about Ktaadn," *Scribner's Monthly* 16 (May 1878): 39-40, 42, 45.
69. As Gifford recalled, he went "to fish for trout. . . . Nominally, we go sketching." "Camps and Tramps about Ktaadn," 40. In Gifford's sketchbook from this trip he refers to this trip as the "Katahdin Tea Party," and among the sketches is a small pencil drawing by Church. The sketchbook is in the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Museum, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.
70. Notably because Ludlow's wife, Rosalie, had by then divorced him to marry the artist.
71. Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 112.
72. Arthur Pendarves Vivian, *Wanderings in the Western Land* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1879), vi.
73. "Bierstadt in the Yo-Semite," *Golden Era* 11 (13 September 1863): 4.
74. "Our Artist Bierstadt," *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, 25 September 1863. Bierstadt Scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries Collections, Gift of Joyce Randall Edwards.
75. "Bierstadt in the Yo-Semite," *Golden Era* 11 (13 September 1863): 4; "Bierstadt in the Yo-Semite," *Golden Era* 11 (27 September 1863): 4.
76. Inigo [Charles Henry Webb], "Bierstadt's Sketches," *Golden Era* 11 (27 September 1863): 5. Bierstadt Scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum.
77. "Albert Bierstadt . . . has accumulated a great quantity of fine material during his year's residence on the coast, and has exhibited great energy and industry in his pursuit of it among the rugged places of the Sierra Nevada. He will have a studio in this city during the winter." *San Francisco Bulletin*, 9 November 1872; quoted in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 226. On 11 January 1873 the *Bulletin* noted, "The studio . . . is a tall, slight frame house, especially built for him at the very top of Clay street hill, and about 300 feet above sea level. . . . Here Mr. Bierstadt has been studying rise and sunset effects, in addition to finishing his magnum opus"; quoted in Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1974), 224-25.
78. *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, 1 August 1871; quoted in Anderson, "Albert Bierstadt: The Path to California." A notice appeared in the *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, 5 March 1872; quoted in Gordon Hendricks, "The First Three Western Journeys of Albert Bierstadt," *Art Bulletin* 46, no. 3 (September 1964): 350.
79. D. O. C. Townley, "Albert Bierstadt, N.A.," *Scribner's Monthly* 3 (March 1872): 608 ff.
80. Alexander Katlan has discovered that Winsor & Newton sold precut sheets of artist's board measuring 22 x 27 inches and 23 x 30 inches, which were developed and marketed as an inexpensive alternative to canvas. "Nineteenth Century Materials: The Artist's Tools and Materials for On-Site Oil Sketching," lecture presented at the Albert Bierstadt Symposium, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 24 January 1992.
81. The reader will find an extended discussion of market dynamics in Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire," in William H. Truettner and Wallach, eds., *Thomas Cole: Landscape into History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, for the National Museum of American Art, 1993).
82. "Art and Studio Gossip," *New York Daily Tribune*, 25 January 1872; "Art Notes," *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 May 1872; cited in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 134.



Collecting the Painted Sketch

A faithful study from Nature is worth more, and will be more eagerly sought than any picture which cost the same labor and thought. . . . There is not an intelligent picture-buyer in the city, who would not rather have the study than the picture at the same price.¹

Between 1858 and 1864 the oil sketch became a fixture in the New York art world. Welcomed at the Academy and a mainstay at artists' receptions, the painted sketch occupied a niche that expanded to encompass an impressive spectrum of charitable causes, solo exhibitions, and special events. Oil sketches appeared at social clubs including the Union Club and the Century, which had its own substantial collection of fine art. Advocates included a growing number of private collectors who fueled this market, in some cases specifying a preference for small paintings and oil sketches. These collectors, such as Samuel P. Avery, the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon, and the artist and writer Charles Lanman, befriended many of the artists whose works graced their walls and arranged to purchase works directly from their studios as well as through public channels. By expressing a preference for sketches and small paintings, these collectors signaled the emergence of middle-class art patrons who were unable to purchase or uninterested in purchasing large-scale easel paintings. As the avenues for collecting such small works expanded, so did the issues surrounding their evaluation as works of art.

Several events in 1858 secured the reputation of the painted sketch as a desirable work of art, notably the inauguration of artists' receptions at Dodworth's and the Tenth Street Studio Building. Additionally, the untimely death of fellow artist William Tylee Ranney prompted the establishment of the Ranney Fund. Proceeds from the sale of his colleagues' donated works of art helped support the artist's widow and children.² Many of the works were small paintings and sketches. Frederic



FIG. 41 Frederic Edwin Church, *Morning in the Tropics*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 8 × 14 in. The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 37.147

Edwin Church's contribution, *Morning in the Tropics* (fig. 41), sold for \$550, thereby commanding "the largest price ever given in this country for so small a landscape."³ The following year the Ranney Fund was renamed the Artists' Fund Society, and annual exhibitions and sales created a standing fund to aid other artists and their families.⁴ In December 1861 Albert Bierstadt's *Trappers' Camp* (cat. 76) was sold for \$65 at the Artists' Fund Sale, which was held at the Tenth Street Studio Building. Landscape paintings dominated the event, at which "the most spirited competition was for the works of Durand, Huntington, Casilear, Kensett, Leutze, Gifford, Hubbard, Whittredge, and Bierstadt."⁵

The Civil War also provided opportunities to place smaller paintings in the public eye. In 1861 Bierstadt sold a small work titled *Near the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains* (unlocated) for fifty dollars at the Patriotic Fund Sale to benefit families of war volunteers.⁶ But the premier art event during the war was the New York Sanitary Fair of 1864, an exhibition and auction organized to benefit the Union Red Cross. John Frederick Kensett chaired the fine-arts committee, which would eventually showcase three hundred paintings, two hundred of which were auctioned for a total close to one million dollars, at that time and during an economic depression a staggering amount of money.⁷

Shortly after his return from his first trip to Yosemite, Bierstadt began preparing the works he would send to the fair. While Church's *Heart of the Andes* and Bierstadt's *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (both The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) vied for acclaim as masterpieces of the landscape art, Bierstadt's much smaller painting, *Valley of the Yosemite* (cat. 81) attracted

its own notice as a "glorious fragment of California scenery," the first of his views of Yosemite to be exhibited publicly. Its warm, golden light and grand, yet bucolic loveliness was ample assurance of the West's role as a place of renewal and bright promise:

[H]e [Bierstadt] is the man who launches boldly into the heart of an undiscovered country, enduring the hardships of the doughty explorer and facing danger as quietly and yet as bravely as the eldest frontiersman, and all for the sake of filling a few portfolios with novel sketches and studies. . . . A pair of brilliant little Colorado studies, hardly 10 inches square, represent \$500 apiece. A glorious fragment of California scenery—the canvas does not measure a full foot on any of its four sides—sells for and receives \$1000. The larger works, like the "Yosemite" and "Rocky Mountain" masterpieces, bring from \$10,000 to \$20,000 each.⁸

Bierstadt's diminutive painting sold for \$1,600, the highest price paid for a work auctioned at the fair.⁹

This positive response to Bierstadt's oil sketches may have been the impetus behind the artist's willingness to send groups of finished sketches to smaller exhibitions, especially late in his career. Bierstadt showed at least ten to fifteen oil sketches at the First Minneapolis Industrial Exposition in 1886, including seven works containing the phrase "Study of" in their titles. Although the catalogue did not include the sizes of the works, these sketches were listed at prices ranging from \$150 to \$500, within reason for Bierstadt's finished sketches. At the Second Annual Western Pennsylvania Exposition Society in Pittsburgh, in 1890, Bierstadt

displayed twenty-two works of varied scale; based on the prices listed, six may well have been finished sketches.¹⁰ These venues not only showcased the artist's smaller paintings but expanded his audience to a relatively new market between the two coasts.

Artists also presented oil sketches as gifts to family members and close friends. Church made a habit of painting small works all his life, variously executed on paper, board, and canvas, as wedding and birthday presents, pictures to celebrate births and mourn deaths, and as sketch-club social exercises.¹¹ Primarily painted in the studio, these works were highly prized during Church's lifetime, as they constituted examples of the artist's work at a fraction of the prices commanded for his celebrated Great Pictures. Among Church's most appealing oil sketches in this vein is that of Oosisoak, the Arctic explorer Dr. Isaac Hayes's favorite sled dog (fig. 42) who accompanied the explorer even to his lectures. Completed in under two hours, it is a charming example of the artist's flair for capturing the heart of his subject, be it landscape or animal.¹² Oosisoak's thoughtful and grave expression reflects Church's own appreciation for a fellow explorer. He displayed the painting two weeks after Hayes's return from his first Arctic expedition in November 1861, in the same gallery hosting the Artists' Fund auction. Church then hung the work in his studio, where it attracted attention from a visitor who delighted in the animal's "bright, fierce face."¹³ Despite the public attention Church directed to the work he chose not to sell it, instead giving it to his wife.¹⁴ *Oosisoak* remained at Olana until after their deaths.¹⁵

Perhaps the most celebrated gift-giving event involving oil sketches took place in 1864, at a party to honor William Cullen Bryant's seventieth birthday. This was by no means a small affair, with over four hundred artists, writers, and public figures in attendance.¹⁶ During the preceding weeks Bryant's artist friends put together an album of sketches and mementos. Some of these works were presented after the fact, in deference to the haste with which the event was organized. Among the treasures presented to Bryant were Church's *Century Plant at Cotopaxi, Ecuador*, Jasper Francis Cropsey's *Lake*, and Jervis McEntee's *Early Spring* (cats. 34, 49, 50). Given Bryant's contributions to the literature extolling the virtues of the American landscape and his close friendship with Thomas Cole, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the oil sketches presented to Bryant



FIG. 42 Frederic Edwin Church, *Oosisoak*, ca. November 1861. Oil on canvas, 23 × 17 in. Private collection

were landscapes. Further, the titles some of the artists chose for their sketches alluded to passages in Bryant's poems; McEntee in particular took the occasion quite seriously (see cat. 50). The event and the sketch album received extensive notice in journals and newspapers, as befitting a celebration of both the poet and his influence on American culture. Bryant's heirs in turn bequeathed the collection of sketches to the Century Association, to which many of the artists also belonged.

The Century played its own significant role in the support of the arts. The club purchased Kensett's *Coast Scene* for one hundred dollars in 1863 to help the artist financially. Kensett and Asher B. Durand were two of seven members receiving such assistance. The Century's patronage of the arts did not end there; the previous year the membership voted to accept works of art in lieu of the fifty-dollar initiation fee, which allowed the club to acquire numerous fine paintings, including one by McEntee.¹⁷ The Century's reputation for supporting the arts was also acknowledged in the form of bequests,



FIG. 43 Asher B. Durand,
Kaaterskill Clove, ca. 1865.
Oil on canvas, 17 × 24 in.
Yale University Art Gallery,
Gift of George H. Danforth,
1974, B.A. 1926, 1974.47.1

notably Bryant's, and that of Edward Slosson, from whose collection Kensett's *Hemlock* (cat. 20) came.

Not surprisingly, private clubs like the Century hosted exhibitions of members' paintings during their lifetimes and held memorial meetings and small memorial exhibitions after their deaths. Both McEntee and Worthington Whittredge held exhibitions in the gallery of the Century Association, quietly offering designated works for sale through the club's business office.¹⁸ Memorial meetings for Kensett, Gifford, and Durand offered the opportunity for eulogies and recollections.

Sales provide perhaps the best barometer of the growing interest in sketches on the part of private collectors. Church sold several of his preliminary studies to friends and patrons. The study for *New England Scenery*, 1850, was purchased by William D. Sherrerd, while the artist sold the study for *Sunset in Vermont* for four hundred dollars in 1867 to Joshua Taylor Johnston, the original purchaser of the artist's *Niagara* and *Twilight in the Wilderness*.¹⁹ Jonathan Sturges acquired Church's study for *Jerusalem*, a sketch mentioned in a London review of the artist's works.²⁰ The prices for Church's sketches were high relative to those of his larger canvases, indicative of his assessment of the effort that went into their making and his reluctance to part with them. In 1854 the artist had listed his prices for a prospective client, indicating that a painting two by three feet would cost five hundred dollars, up from four hundred the previous year;²¹ by 1880 he quoted a figure of two thousand dollars for a painting the same size.²² In 1870 Church wrote to a would-be patron, "My price for a picture 15 × 10 inches is \$500. The smaller size you mention would be the same—for it would occupy

quite as much time and at the same time be more troublesome to paint."²³

Several of Church's oil sketches from Niagara Falls and Labrador bear penciled notations of prices on the reverse; similarly, scenes of New England in the fall were earmarked for sale at three hundred to one thousand dollars each.²⁴ By contrast, Durand's studies from nature rarely commanded more than the \$150 Avery paid in 1866 for his *Study for the Catskill Clove* (now called *Kaaterskill Clove*), painted about 1865 (fig. 43).²⁵ In these instances Church could sell his finished sketches for close to what his colleagues got for some of their easel paintings. At the height of Gifford's career, in 1876, his largest canvases sold for around \$1,600,²⁶ while Kensett's account books for the same period list his highest price for a finished painting in the range of \$3,000 to \$5,000.²⁷ In 1860 a correspondent for the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* noted, "A good work by Durand, Kensett, Hicks, Huntington, &c., can be had for three hundred dollars, while they command a thousand dollars for some of their more elaborate labors. Church obtains his own price, for he paints only one picture where one hundred are asked." Of Cropsey, the author noted, "some of his best small paintings have, within the last year, been put on the market by private holders, and have ranged in price from forty to two hundred dollars."²⁸

Among the most active "private holders" of oil sketches was the Reverend Magoon, a Baptist minister who collected smaller works by major artists. Magoon began collecting American art in 1856, soliciting sketches and small, finished landscapes from most of the prominent painters of the day. In his own words, he

FIG. 44 Sanford Robinson Gifford, *The Shrine of Shakespeare*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 9 × 15½ in. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Gallery, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, Gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.35



“took all the money then at command, and went frankly to ten of the best artists in New York, and asked them individually if they would do such a subject for so much. In every instance the proposition was kindly complied with and a hundred like commissions have since followed.”²⁹ Magoon specified American landscapes, believing them to be representative of the qualities of American life and indicative of a growing national sensibility of the intensely spiritual experience of understanding and interpreting nature. In his own words, “The diversified landscapes of our country exert no slight influence in creating our character as individuals, and in confirming our destiny as a nation.”³⁰ His commitment to American painting, and to the landscape, may be summed up in his statement, “Art is but nature better understood.”³¹

By and large, Magoon’s taste ran not to plein-air studies of foliage or individual “bits” of nature but to

completed compositional studies, to which he referred as “a nice small bit with brains.”³² He relaxed his avowed preference for North American scenery in several notable cases, among them works by Church, Gifford, Cropsey, and an elusive sketch by Cole.³³ From Gifford, Magoon acquired four small oils, none of them American landscapes: *Lake Maggiore*, *The Roman Campagna* (cats. 55, 56), *The Shrine of Shakespeare*, and *Sunrise on the Bernese Alps* (figs. 44, 45). Church, ever loath to give up his more useful and engaging oil sketches, sold Magoon the preliminary sketches for three major paintings, one of which was set in South America. *Evening in Vermont* (fig. 46), dated August 1849, served as a guide for *Twilight, Short Arbiter ’Twixt Day and Night* of 1850 (Newark Museum, N.J.); *Summer in South America* (fig. 47), painted from the sketches made from his visit in 1853, preceded *Scene on the Magdalene River* of 1854 (National Academy Museum, New York); and *Autumn in North*

FIG. 45 Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Sunrise on the Bernese Alps*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 9 × 15½ in. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Gallery, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, Gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.36





FIG. 46 Frederic Edwin Church, *Evening in Vermont*, August 1849. Oil on board, 5½ × 11 in. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, Gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.17



FIG. 47 Frederic Edwin Church, *Summer in South America*, ca. 1853. Oil on board, 11 × 16¾ in. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, Gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.18

America was among the preliminary studies for the much larger painting titled *Autumn* now at Olana, both finished in 1856 (see cat. 23).³⁴ An account of a reception held at Magoon's home in late February 1856 mentioned two of his newest acquisitions: Church's *Autumn in North America* and Cropsey's oil sketch *Evening at Paestum* (cat. 48), also painted that year.³⁵

Private collectors, ranging from merchants and bankers to dealers and ministers, sought out oil sketches and smaller works in addition to the large-scale easel paintings. The *Crayon* profiled several prominent collectors and described other collections that included oil sketches.³⁶ Charles Lanman, whose book *Letters from a Landscape Painter* inspired Durand's series of letters in the *Crayon*, assembled a "most unique and valuable" collection of sketches including works by the English artists Sir Edwin Landseer, Copley Fielding, and Sir Charles Eastlake, and the Americans William Sidney Mount, Huntington, Durand, Ranney, and John F. Weir.³⁷ Charles Isham bought Cropsey's *Study of Star-rucca Vale, NY & E.R.R.* for two hundred dollars in November 1864.³⁸

The most prominent collector who eagerly included oil sketches in his personal holdings and sales inventory was Samuel P. Avery. Avery accumulated a large number of small and large works by American landscape painters, often presenting them at soirées or private parties held in his home.³⁹ In some cases he expressed a specific preference for a sketch, as evinced by his correspondence with Kensett. Having spied a sketch hanging on a screen in the artist's studio, he wrote:

[I] now write to ask—whether you will be willing *and have the time* to paint me a sketch? to fit the frame sent by the bearer and as a companion to Mr. Casilear's bit. My means do not admit of my gathering large works, but I have got together some small things by my friends Cropsey, Gifford—Colman, Hall, Hart, and others—and I will be much gratified if you are kind enough to add your name and work to the list. . . . I can pay 20\$ or 25\$ and would *prefer* (providing you consent) to have a slight rendering of one of your sketches (on the screen).⁴⁰

After receiving Kensett's sketch, Avery wrote, "On the

eve of the 9th many artists and gentlemen of taste fully confirmed my estimate of the little work, and I hope in the fall to have the pleasure of showing you how I take care of my little collection."⁴¹ Avery's request for Kensett to paint a copy of one of his field sketches for his personal collection indicates the growing interest in such works among collectors, and underscores Kensett's preference for painting a copy rather than parting with the original.

A lively secondary market for smaller works developed as well. In 1857 the *Crayon* announced the sale of the A. E. Douglass collection, at which "several sketches by Cropsey, ranging from \$10 to \$90 each, according to size" were auctioned.⁴² In addition to the steady flow of paintings and oil sketches that Avery sold as his livelihood, some of his personal collection was auctioned in March 1871 to fund his own upcoming trip to Europe. Mentioned among the lots were "several admirable studies of warm rich color" by Gifford and "several unusual happy bits of woodland nature" by Kensett, McEntee, and Aaron Draper Shattuck.⁴³ As a dealer and collector, Avery stood at the crossroads of the art market during the 1860s, brokering works of art to collectors like Magoon. Mixing personal patronage of artists with more formal representation of their work, he helped shape the taste for oil sketches and Barbizon-inspired paintings in New York during the final quarter of the century.

Occasionally artists made such works available in public sales held in their studios, usually to finance travel and study abroad. Cropsey held a widely publicized sale of major paintings and smaller sketches in anticipation of his trip overseas in 1856.⁴⁴ After noting Cropsey's intentions, the *Crayon* covered the results of the sale, remarking that "another point illuminated by this sale is the market value of sketches from Nature, and generally the preference for small works. . . . We believe that small careful studies from nature will 'pay' better than any description of Art-production in vogue, and if artists prefer to make few of them, and dilute them on huge canvasses [*sic*], they need not wonder if they lose their time."⁴⁵ According to Cropsey's account book, several of the sketches sold for between \$25 and \$62, a range consistent with other sales of his sketches recorded between 1850 and 1860.⁴⁶ Prior to his return to the United States in 1863, Cropsey arranged to have 125 "Pictures and Sketches" auctioned at Pall Mall in London, including over thirty small-scale works labeled "studies."⁴⁷ Durand also recognized the growing vogue

for smaller, more intimate works, arranging a sale of one hundred of his studies from nature in December 1867.⁴⁸ Although no annotated copy of Durand's sales catalogue listing prices paid has surfaced, exhibition reviews are positive enough to suggest the artist had good reason to make such a large number of his studies available at one time.

Such opportunities offered collectors access to a more personal and private part of the artist's oeuvre. This newfound accessibility to both the artists and their sketches had its drawbacks. Greater visibility led naturally to increasing interest in the smaller works on display, and the constant barrage of requests for sketches and small paintings might well have made some artists wish for a greater degree of privacy. The conundrum of the public acceptance of oil sketches as works of art was that while artists made easel paintings expressly for sale, they more often painted their sketches for their own use and enjoyment. Part of an artist's reluctance to give away or sell his sketches rested on this more personal aspect of their making. Church turned down the majority of solicitations he received for small paintings from his studio. In 1869, having just returned from Europe and the Middle East, he responded to one such request from Bierstadt's sister Eliza, alluding to a lengthy list of souls waiting for one of his sketches:

Your flattering letter and kind congratulations I fully appreciate—as also the compliment you unintentionally paid—by expressing the desire to possess one of my sketches—I am only sorry that I cannot at once put my hand on something to send to you—but in fact I have not a thing worthy or unworthy of me—For I have done but little for a long time but sketch from Nature—

The only painful thing connected with your letter lay in the fact that it recalled to mind a number of applications of a similar kind—from various friends—I am ashamed to confess that the greater part have not been attended to—as yet—although I am always hoping for the time to come when I may be able to satisfy the wishes of all[.]⁴⁹

In this and one other letter to Miss Bierstadt, Church was at pains to distinguish between those painted "bits" suitable for distribution and his more closely guarded sketches directly painted from nature. Unspoken in Church's polite response is the private quality intrinsic to the artist's plein-air oil sketches.

Their value lay as much in the connection between the artist and the subject as in their usefulness in the studio. Some sketches proved too personal, like a visual diary written in a language accessible only to its creator, and thus cherished by him all the more.

Artists were often asked to part with sketches of high quality, especially if they had already served their initial purpose as a compositional guide for an easel painting. The *Crayon* complained that for the artist,

Nothing is more common than to hear some of his well-meaning, but uninitiated friends making a polite demand, or visiting his painting-rooms for a "little sketch;" which generally means some study they observe hanging upon his walls, that they have not the most distant notion can be of any particular use or value to him, and that they imagine he can give away—especially if he has once used it in a picture. . . . It is often in vain that the unfortunate object of their passion for the Fine Arts, endeavors to explain to them the importance of his sketch to himself.⁵⁰

Some of those well-meaning friends were fellow artists. Durand made some of his studies available to his colleagues, in response to such letters as this one:

Dear Sir,

Perhaps I am now asking *too much* of you; if so, excuse me, & I will endeavor to be less impertinent for the future. My knowing of your being so kind & obliging as to occasionally lend some of your *landscape-studies* to artists in the city, I make bold to ask whether *you would do the same by me, away off in the country here!*

If you have 1 or 2 that you are not going to make use of immediately, & would lend them to me, I will send a good box for them.⁵¹

Without doubt the request dreaded by most artists came from women compiling ladies' albums. These were groups of oil sketches and drawings donated by artists and assembled into albums for sale to the highest bidder. Ladies' albums enjoyed tremendous popularity with patrons during the nineteenth century, but artists described being plagued by hordes of female visitors, all desiring a sketch to place in such keepsakes. The *Crayon* referred to this as a "system of intellectual extortion, practiced under the protection of that all-devouring dragon of pictorial offspring—a lady's album."⁵² In one

case, Church delicately declined sending a sketch for a Miss Whitwell's album, explaining,

you have no conception of the Multitude of calls I have—to furnish sketches for benevolent purposes—I was compelled some time (years) ago to make it a rule not to contribute *pictures* for charitable purposes. . . . I might with propriety add here that Mrs. Gaudy's Album was considered among the Artists who have spoken to me about it, as a failure—it did not sell readily and the price it fetched was not commensurate with the value of the sketches. The sketches properly mounted or framed would have sold separately for a vastly higher figure than was attained.⁵³

Church alludes to the existence of an active, lucrative market for oil sketches. Moreover, his parting comment makes clear his belief that such sketches "properly mounted or framed" should be displayed and sold as works of art rather than distributed as studio souvenirs.

Studio souvenirs did serve as a small but popular feature of a visit to an artist's studio. Conceived as tokens of appreciation, these small bits became enticements to attract individuals and groups of visitors to come calling. Bierstadt ended his career as the master of such flourishes, painting abstract butterflies while onlookers admired his dexterity (cat. 87). It was a far cry from his parties catered by Delmonico's but served its purpose, attracting a similar amount of attention in the press.

The press certainly enhanced the public aspect of the artist's city studio, calling attention to the social events held there and to the works of art on display. Reception, parties, and open-house days lent the artist's primary work space a festive air reminiscent of the soirées hosted by prominent collectors. Partially as an antidote to, and wholly representative of, the glorified stature of the successful landscape painter were the impressive country homes artists built along the Hudson River.⁵⁴ One prominent feature of the house was the artist's studio, designed to his specifications. Another was the opportunity for the artist to display his private art collection. His own oil sketches and in some cases the works of his friends were framed and hung on the walls of his home as finished and treasured works of art.

Bierstadt and Church both built houses with large, custom-designed studios, in which they merged their roles as painters and collectors. In 1866 Bierstadt's



FIG. 48 Charles Bierstadt, Malkasten studio, looking east from the library, ca. 1875. Stereograph. Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries Collection, Gift of Joyce Randall Edwards

Malkasten, originally called Hawksrest, was the first of these palatial residences to spring up along the eastern palisades of the Hudson.⁵⁵ Its grandeur was an appropriate measure of Bierstadt's success and acceptance as a prominent member of society. Ten years later the *Art Journal* published an article on Malkasten. Featured was an engraving of the artist at work on the lawn, an unusually large canvas on his easel, the magnificent residence looming on the horizon. The writer described the studio as being three stories tall, featuring one wall made entirely of glass. The studio and its accompanying library alcove were seventy feet long, providing space not only for distant views of the latest Great Picture but also for entertaining on a scale commensurate with the price of the works of art being produced. The artist's brother Charles made a set of stereographs of the studio interior that conveys the scale of the space and the opulence of the furnishings (figs. 48, 49). An earlier article had described the studio as a highly functional and impressively decorated work space:



FIG. 49 Charles Bierstadt, Malkasten studio, looking west toward the library, ca. 1875. Stereograph. Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries Collection, Gift of Joyce Randall Edwards

distributed around the room are half a dozen easels, containing pictures in various stages of progress. The three sides of this part of the studio are covered with hundreds of studies, made by the artist in almost every portion of the globe, under every aspect of storm and sunshine, and in every season of the year. . . . Above the sliding doors marking the division between studio proper and the library, in the studio side, is a gallery, used by Mr. Bierstadt to obtain an elevated point of view when painting certain of his pictures.⁵⁶

Still another article on Malkasten focused on oil sketches mounted in oak and black walnut paneling that wound around the top of the studio and library walls.⁵⁷ The frieze of sketches comprised "studies in oil, of uniform size, made in Europe and America. They are very well finished sketches, and form an unlimited source of pleasure and instruction, being like a panorama of the choicest landscapes in the two continents."⁵⁸

Sketches mounted well above eye level were of little use as reference tools in assembling the elements of a work in progress; their display instead underscored the expanded role of the studio as salon, private art gallery, and trophy room. At Malkasten the large number of sketches displayed in panels and on easels pointed to the artist's prolific and all-encompassing interests.⁵⁹ When Malkasten burned to the ground in 1882, the fire damaged or destroyed everything within. The artist tabulated his losses, which were considerable.⁶⁰ However, by the time of the fire he and his wife had all but ceased to live there on a regular basis, preferring to travel or stay in New York. Bierstadt's city studio clearly housed considerable numbers of paintings, sketches, and artifacts that have survived to this day. Included among them is a plethora of oil sketches, some dating from his earliest trip west, indicating that much of the material that the artist actually used for his paintings remained close at hand.

Church effectively retired to Olana during and after its construction, maintaining loose contact with his colleagues thereafter. From Germany, he had written to his friend and patron William H. Osborn of his desire to "build a modest, substantial house for a permanent home. . . . I have got a perfect situation and a perfect site

for it."⁶¹ Built on ground he had sketched since his apprenticeship with Cole, Olana provided Church with a kind of closure to his public career that simultaneously opened new vistas for his oil-sketching oeuvre. During the 1870s and 1880s, Church devoted much of his energies to working on the house and studio and to sculpting the actual landscape.⁶² As the estate took shape, Olana became the literal center of the artist's world.

Church's home provided what was essentially a private collector's environment for his framed oil sketches. Those visitors who had once called on Church in his studio now paid house calls, often to see the artist's portfolios of sketches as a social exercise. Oil sketches and other small paintings would end up propped against stairs and landings, the subject of the visitor's and artist's enjoyment.⁶³ Church made these works available to a select group of his friends and those whom he admired. To Bayard Taylor, who had offered to escort Church's *Heart of the Andes* to Berlin so that Alexander von Humboldt might see it, the artist wrote, "I am sorry not to have seen you before I left New York—I should have been glad to have shown to you My South American Studies—but I trust that we shall have time for that."⁶⁴ During his stay in London in 1869 Church struck up a friendship with the eminent British archae-



FIG. 50 The family sitting room (Petra Room) at Olana State Historic Site

FIG. 51 The front parlor at Olana State Historic Site



ologist and writer Amelia Edwards, to whom he wrote, "I should have been delighted to have shown to you some of my Syrian sketches," and in gratitude for her kind words regarding his *Damascus*, sent to her "an oil sketch (very sketchy) to be framed. . . . It represents the kind of scenery I found in the Bavarian Alps last summer although not an actual view."⁶⁵ Church regarded both his sketches and his friend Osborn highly enough to entrust his patron with "a number of finished sketches from nature which I will put in a portfolio and place for your keeping as security—one is framed."⁶⁶ The last phrase shows that Church considered his most accomplished sketches as finished works of art. In reserving access to his more personal sketches to his close friends and esteemed colleagues, Church maintained a distinction between the public and private facets of his career belied by his earlier use of select sketches to market himself and his achievements.

Church cared enough for some of his own efforts that he framed and hung his oil sketches throughout the house. Judging from the number of works placed in frames dating to the 1870s and 1880s,⁶⁷ he went through his portfolios of oil sketches as Olana was being built, carefully choosing the small works he and his wife, Isabel, wanted around them. Based on household

records and old photographs, the Olana we see today presents paintings and oil sketches hung throughout the house as they were installed during the 1890s, providing a glimpse into the Churches' private world. Over twenty oil sketches adorn the walls of the first-floor public rooms, many in frames Church chose or designed. Their prominence on the walls of both the public sitting rooms and the family's living quarters on the second floor reinforced their function as reminders of Church's artistic triumphs and important moments in the Churches' lives.

The sketches Church displayed at Olana included works he had exhibited at the height of his career, notably *Twilight, a Sketch* and the finished studies of *Horseshoe Falls* and *Under Niagara* (see cats. 31, 27, 30). As reminders of past triumphs, they chronicled his rise to prominence. *Twilight, a Sketch* and *Horseshoe Falls* hang in a corner of the family sitting room (fig. 50), part of a program spanning the breadth of Church's career. The finished painting of *El Khasné, Petra* dominates the room; Cole's brooding *Protestant Cemetery* hangs on an adjacent wall. A suite of small works fills much of the space in between, including an oil sketch of the Silk tomb at Petra and a winter scene of Olana. The pair of small paintings titled *Sunrise* and *Moonrise*, painted to

commemorate the births of the Churches' first two children, hang there as well.⁶⁸ A spare but beautifully painted sketch of the Tercer Orden church in Mexico, a gift from Church to his wife on her sixtieth birthday, appears on an adjacent wall, one of two works from the 1890s hanging in the public rooms of the house. The room's cumulative effect is an overview of Church's career. The front parlor (fig. 51) is equally richly appointed, presenting several oil sketches of Olana, including another winter scene, along with both *Sunset, Jamaica* and *The After Glow* (see cat. 37, fig. 85). Over the doors Church hung a row of small painted sketches, scenes of Hudson, Mexico, and Vermont among them.

A feature writer visiting in 1890 recalled, "Perhaps the most interesting room . . . was that of Mrs. Church, in the second story. Its walls are covered by small paintings by Mr. Church, which he modestly spoke of in a somewhat slighting manner as he rearranged on a table a charming bit which a servant had placed upside down."⁶⁹ The paintings hanging in Isabel's room descended to the Churches' daughter, Isabel "Downie" Church; many have remained in private hands. In her diary she recorded her fondness for the works she inherited:

My pictures have some of them come—the "Valley of the Sta Isabella" is my favorite—tho it is very small—then there is a superb and very large Marine, sunset—more autumn sketches, the original of the "Parthenon"—the "Meteor" some ruins by moonlight, and a conglomerate picture, of ruins[,] arches, water, and a big beautiful column, twined over with vines, all hazy and dreamy—a regular poem—it always fascinated me as a child—then, I have a "Koenig see" and the Olana view in winter, long long ago, just the way it looked in my childhood. . . . Most of these being in her bed-room.⁷⁰

Downie's reminiscence about the significance and placement of the works she had received echo the thought that went into their original installation in the house.

Church played up the connection between the painted landscapes inside and the actual landscape visible through the windows. The same writer who commented on Mrs. Church's room was struck by this and noted, "A window of a single pane of plate glass is surrounded by a frame, in such a manner as to give one the impression of gazing at a beautiful picture of river and mountains, instead of looking through a window."⁷¹

Olana represented the summation of Church's career, the site having become the nexus of the actual and depicted landscape. Windows, framed with moldings resembling picture frames, offered views of landscapes constructed by Church, complemented by painted sketches of those vistas hung within the house.

Public interest in these artists' homes, studios, and oil sketches did not wane in tandem with their reputations. An article written by Ishmael in 1891 titled "A Visit to the Studios" featured lavish and favorable attention to Bierstadt's Broadway studio, well after the artist's career had peaked. The *Home Journal* reviewer visited Malkasten in 1871; the *Boston Herald's* newspaper article on Olana, detailing the writer's visit with the Church family, appeared in 1890. In both reports the authors illustrated or described the artist at work, focusing on the making of oil sketches and their display within the home. Curiosity and interest in the more personal and private aspect of these artists' lives and oeuvres encouraged such attention so late in their careers. That interest in turn reflected the shifting aesthetic standards of the last quarter of the century, during which the painted sketch continued to attract favorable attention as an independent work of art.

NOTES

1. "Sketchings. Exhibition of the Academy of Design. No. II," *Crayon* 1 (4 April 1855): 218.
2. "Exhibitions," *Crayon* 5, no. 12 (December 1858): 354–55; Thomas Seir Cummings, *Historic Annals of the National Academy of Design, New-York Drawing Association, Etc., with Occasional Dottings by the Way-Side, from 1825 to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1865; reprint, New York: Kennedy Galleries, DaCapo Press, 1969), 291.
3. Church exhibited this work at the Century Association earlier that year, and it was engraved in 1860, the print being roughly the same size as the original. *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 21 January 1861, 1; David C. Huntington, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826–1900: Painter of the Adamic New World Myth" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1960), 106.
4. Sanford Robinson Gifford and John Frederick Kensett were founding members of the Artists' Fund Society. See also Jay E. Cantor, "Every Patron a Pericles: The Century Association and the Encouragement of American Art," *Century Association* (14 January–12 February 1997): 5.
5. *New York Post*, 23 December 1861; quoted in Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990), 147, 164.
6. *New York Post*, 29 May 1861; *Home Journal*, 8 June 1861. In 1863 Bierstadt painted another small work bearing the same title, inscribed on the verso: *For the Union Defenders #2285 and Near the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains / for the Italian Fund / Care of Prof. Bajani 40½ East 11th / A. Bierstadt* (private collection).
7. "Art Notes—the Art Gallery of the Sanitary Fair," *New York Times*, 11 April 1864. The committee members included Bierstadt, Daniel Huntington, Worthington Whittredge, Jonathan Sturges, Thomas Hicks, Christopher Pearse Cranch, William T. Blodgett, A. M. Cozzens, Emanuel Leutze, and Mathew Brady. United States Sanitary Commission, *Record of the Metropolitan Fair in the Aid of the United States Sanitary Commission, Held at New York, in April, 1864* (New York, 1864), 244–45. Also cited in John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* (New York: Worcester Museum, in association with W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 39.
8. "American Artists," *Chicago Times*, 4 December 1870, 12.
9. Nancy K. Anderson, "Albert Bierstadt: The Path to California, 1830–1874" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1985), 278.
10. *Complete Catalogue of the Art Department of the First Minneapolis Industrial Exposition, of Casts from Antique Statuary, European and American Modern Paintings, Engravings, Etchings, etc.* (1886), 34. *Second Annual Western Pennsylvania Exposition Society, Pittsburgh, Penn'a, September 3d to October 18th, 1890 Catalogue, Art Department*, "Bierstadt Collection," 20. Photocopies courtesy of Dr. William H. Gerdts.
11. Church may have painted *Too Soon* (7 × 9¼ in., oil on canvas) for a session of the New York Sketch Club in 1847, during its inaugural year. See Franklin Kelly, *Frederic Edwin Church and the National Landscape* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 12 n. 45. Also see Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1:106 and n. 18 for references to this sketch club and the original Sketch Club of which Cole was a member.
12. Church to Isaac Hayes, New York, 3 May 1862. Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Library of Congress).
13. "What Our Artists Are Doing," *Harper's Bazar* (25 January 1868): 202.
14. In a letter to Hayes, Church explained: "it has pleased my friends several of whom wished to purchase it—but I had previously presented it to Mrs. Church who admired the dog very much." Church to Hayes, New York, 3 May 1862. Library of Congress.
15. Carr, *Olana*, 1:277.
16. *The Bryant Festival at "The Century"* (New York: D. Appleton, 1865). For a detailed discussion of the Bryant collection, see A. Hyatt Mayor and Mark Davis, *American Art at the Century* (New York: The Century Association, 1977).
17. *Ibid.*, xxvii.
18. The record for McEntee's exhibition appears in the Century's archive for 15 March 1884, complete with a list of the 81 works and their dates, ranging from 1864 to 1882. Whittredge's exhibition for 1904 was accompanied by a small catalogue, *Paintings and Sketches by Worthington Whittredge in the Gallery of the Century Association*, and ran 12–31 March 1904. This exhibition included 127 paintings and sketches, many of which were for sale. Archives of the Century Association.
19. Johnston purchased *Twilight in the Wilderness* at auction for \$4,300 in 1866, noted in the *Nation* 2 (March 1866): 346. Information courtesy of Gerald L. Carr.
20. The citation concerning *Jerusalem* appeared in the London *Anglo-American Times*, 26 February 1870, 13. See Carr, *Olana*, 1: 249.
21. Church to E. P. Mitchell, New York, 14 December 1854. Gratz Collection of Painters and Engravers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
22. Church to Mrs. Billings, Hudson, N.Y., 14 February 1880. Billings Mansion Archives, Woodstock, Vt. Photocopy at Olana.
23. Church to Mr. S. A. Coale, Jr., New York, 7 March 1870. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, Calif.
24. Among those were *Small Waterfalls near Castleton, Vermont* (OL.1978.21), inscribed verso, *Autumn study near Castleton, VT* by

F. E. Church \$500; *Blueberry Hill, Vermont* (OL.1980.1886), inscribed verso, *Autumn Study near Castleton Vermont* by F. E. Church \$1,000.

25. "The 'Clove' matter is all settled—and if you desire can hurry up the settlement? I enclose check for \$150 for the study." Samuel P. Avery to Durand, 25 April 1866. Asher B. Durand Papers, New York Public Library (NYPL); cited in David B. Lawall, *Asher B. Durand: Documentary Catalogue of the Narrative and Landscape Paintings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 188, no. 407.

26. Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 144, 146, 148.

27. In 1869 Morris K. Jesup paid \$3,000 for *Lake George* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); three years earlier the Century Association paid \$5,000 for *Mt. Chocorua* (presented by members in 1867). Kensett account book, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA), reel N68-85, frames 465-88; also cited in Bartlett Cowdrey, "The Return of John Kensett," *Old Print Shop Portfolio* 4, no. 6 (February 1945): 134-35.

28. "The Dollars and Cents of Art," *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 4 (1860): 30.

29. Elias Magoon, *Art Report*, 28 June 1864, 3. Elias Lyman Magoon Papers, Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (Vassar); quoted in Ella Foshay and Sally Mills, *All Seasons and Every Light: Nineteenth-Century American Landscapes from the Collection of Elias Lyman Magoon* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1983), 8. Magoon helped stimulate interest in George Inness's work during 1856: "he [Inness] has painted some clever sketches 12 x 18 at \$25—for order, got by Dr. Magoon, . . . and others." Samuel P. Avery to Jasper F. Cropsey, Sunday, 25 October 1856. Photocopy of a transcript in the correspondence files, Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

30. Magoon, "Scenery and Mind," in *The Home Book of the Picturesque*, 5; quoted in Foshay and Mills, *All Seasons and Every Light*, 14-15.

31. Magoon, *Art Report*, 25 June 1861, 6. Magoon papers, Vassar; quoted in Foshay and Mills, *All Seasons and Every Light*, 15.

32. Letter from Magoon to William Sidney Mount, 8 March 1856. Artists' Autograph Collection, Vassar. My thanks to Rebecca Lawton, curator of art at the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Museum, for providing me with this reference.

33. Cole died before Magoon began collecting paintings; however, he was intent on acquiring one of the artist's small works. Magoon likely purchased Cole's diminutive *Vallombrosa* from Frederic Church, or through Church from Cole's family. Foshay and Mills, *All Seasons and Every Light*, 44.

34. See Franklin Kelly and Gerald L. Carr, *The Early Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church, 1845-1854* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1987), 137, 173.

35. See Carr, *Olana*, 1:225, 227 n. 10. Magoon's reception was written up in the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 4 March 1856, 2.

36. For Magoon's profile, see "Sketchings. Our Private Collections. No. VI," *Crayon* (December 1856): 374.

37. See *Crayon* 1, no. 9 (28 February 1855): 137.

38. William S. Talbot, *Jasper F. Cropsey, 1823-1900* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, for the National Collection of Fine Arts, 1970), 92.

39. Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, Herbert L. Kleinfeld, and Jeanne K. Welcher, eds., *The Diaries, 1871-1882, of Samuel P. Avery, Art Dealer* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), xxx.

40. Samuel P. Avery to Kensett, 17 May (no year). Edwin Morgan Collection, John Frederick Kensett Papers, Samuel P. Avery folder, Manuscripts and Special Services Division, New York State Library, Albany (NYSL).

41. Samuel P. Avery to Kensett, 28 June (no year). Edwin Morgan Collection, John Frederick Kensett Papers, Samuel P. Avery folder, NYSL.

42. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 4, no. 5 (May 1857): 158.

43. "Fine Arts. Private View of the Avery Collection," *New York Daily Tribune*, 13 March 1871; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 133.

44. Advance notices appeared in the New York and Boston newspapers. See *New York Evening Post*, 4 April 1856, 1; *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 8 April 1856.

45. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 3, no. 5 (May 1856): 158-59.

46. A photocopy of Cropsey's account book, covering 1845-67, is in the collection of the Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

47. *A Catalogue of a Collection of Finished Pictures and Sketches of the Talented American artist, J. F. Cropsey, Esq., Illustrating the Grand and Beautiful Scenery in America, as well as Views in Other Countries . . .* (London: Messrs. Foster, at the Gallery, 54 Pall Mall, Wednesday the 29th of April, 1863).

48. Durand's sale catalogue listed each work by the location depicted but gave no dimensions. It is not clear how many works sold, and there was apparently no distinguishing stamp or mark on the works to indicate which paintings were in the sale. The sale took place 5 December 1867 in New York City. See Lawall, *Documentary Catalogue*, 196.

49. Church to Miss Bierstadt, Hudson, 3 September 1869. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

50. *Crayon* 2, no. 9 (29 August 1855): 128.

51. Sanford Thayer to Durand, Syracuse, 16 March 1850. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 4, folder 8, NYPL. Durand also received requests for "A few of your studies from nature, Beech, Birch, Oak and Maple trees, and a few rocks, on canvas 12 x 16, I wish them for foreground studies." Letter from Minor B. King to Asher B. Durand, 10 January 1856, Asher B. Durand Papers, NYPL; quoted in Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 298 n. 12.

52. *Crayon* 2, no. 9 (29 August 1855): 128.

53. Church to Mr. Appleton, New York, 16 November 1863. Appleton Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

54. See Sandra S. Phillips et al., *Charmed Places: Hudson River Artists and Their Houses, Studios, and Vistas* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., for the Edith C. Blum Institute, Bard College, and Vassar College Art Gallery, 1988).

55. The artist purchased "five acres of land on the Hudson River, between Irvington and Tarrytown, upon which he will erect a fine stone building, the larger portion of which will be devoted to a studio. The spot selected commands some of the finest and most extensive views on the North river." *New Bedford Mercury*, 10 June 1865; quoted in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 181.

56. Barry Gray [R. B. Coffin], "Homes on the Hudson. VIII. Hawksrest, the Residence of Albert Bierstadt," *Home Journal* (1871). Bierstadt Scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries Collection, Gift of Joyce Randall Edwards.

57. "The Homes of America, II," *Art Journal* (New York), n.s., 2 (1876): 45-46.

58. "Albert Bierstadt at Home," *Home Journal* (1875). Bierstadt Scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum of Art.

59. Bierstadt tended to accumulate studios as he did sketches. In addition to studio space at Malkasten and Tenth Street, in 1873 Bierstadt built a studio in San Francisco, and his father-in-law erected a two-story studio in Waterville, N.Y., near the Osborne family home to encourage the young couple to stay there more often. Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1974), 233.

60. "The studio had in it not only some valuable paintings, but, what was to me almost priceless, the collection that I made during ten years in the Rocky Mountains of costumes, carvings, implements, and paraphernalia of various tribes of Indians, and many objects of a branch of natural history in which I had deeply interested myself. I had made a study of the wild-horned animals of this country and had many specimen heads of the deer, wapiti, mountain sheep, and goats from the time their horns start to grow until they were the most perfect specimens obtainable. For instance, I had fourteen pairs of wapiti heads. . . . In the studio, also, were a great number of valuable studies and sketches." "Burning of Malkasten," *New York Sun*, 11 November 1882. Bierstadt Scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum of Art.

61. Church to Osborn, Berchtesgaden, 29 July 1868. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, David C. Huntington Archives (Olana Archives).

62. In a letter to Erastus Dow Palmer, Church wrote, "I have made about 1 1/4 miles of road this season, opening entirely new and beautiful views—I can make more and better landscapes in this way than by tampering with canvas and paint in the studio." Church to Palmer, Olana, 18 October 1884. Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, Special Collections, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art. To Charles Dudley Warner, Church wrote, "I am busy Landscape Architecturing. I have nearly completed a cliff about a hundred feet in height." Church to Warner, Hudson, 15 August 1887. Olana Archives.

63. Carr, *Olana*, 1:14.

64. Church to Bayard Taylor, Hartford, June 13, 1859. Bayard Taylor Papers, letters to Taylor, box A-Cr, Division of Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, Crock Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

65. Church to Amelia Edwards, [London], Thursday, 17 June 1869. Amelia B. Edwards Papers, Special Collections, Somerville College Library, Oxford University. Edwards did visit Church at Olana; her traveling companion wrote in a letter: "Yesterday we spent hours in looking over sketches, oil sketches of Mr. Church's from Syria, Petraea, Greece, Jamaica, New England, &c. These sketches and studies are wonderful things, studies for Niagara [sic], for Mexican mountain scenery, for his great Damascus, and his great Jerusalem. The breadth and minuteness, the beauty and poetry of them all, are marvellous to me. I do not know why his name is so little known." Letter from Kate Bradbury, Olana, 24-25 December 1889; quoted in Joel D. Sweimler, "Amelia B. Edwards (1832-1892)," *Crayon* (Olana State Historic Site) 22, no. 193 (Fall 1989): 14.

66. Church to Osborn, Hudson, 23 September 1872. Olana Archives.

67. Database of frames on works of art at Olana compiled by Tom Romanchuk, with the supervision of Karen Zukowski, 1992. Copy courtesy of Eli Wilner of Eli Wilner & Co., New York.

68. Traditionally these sketches were considered memorial paintings, as the two children died in 1865. Recent research has supported their having been painted at separate intervals corresponding to the births of the two children. Carr, *Olana*, 1:281-83.

69. Frank J. Bonnelle, "In Summer Time on Olana. Grand Views of the Hudson River and the Catskills," *Boston Sunday Herald*, 7 September 1890, 17.

70. The following year she recorded in her diary, "I am using Pops's sketch box, evidently one he used in Mexico, as I found to my rapture a finished sketch of Popocatepetl [sic] in a little sort of sliding partition." Diary of Isabel Church Black, 25 October 1901. Olana Archives.

71. Bonnelle, "In Summer Time on Olana," *Boston Sunday Herald*, 7 September 1890, 17.



The Oil Sketch as Art

We frequently derive more pleasure and imaginative stimulation from a sketch than from a finished picture.¹

Each of the avenues by which the painted sketch emerged in the art world was carefully controlled by the artist save one, the memorial exhibition. After Thomas Cole's death in 1848, Asher B. Durand organized such an exhibition, which brought together finished paintings and selected contents of Cole's studio.² The memorial exhibition provided a form of closure for friends and family and an opportunity to eulogize the deceased artist's life and career. The catalogue listed only five oil sketches, all preliminary works for Cole's unfinished series *The Cross and the World*. These five sketches and the four finished paintings were hung together, with the fifth sketch providing a sense of what Cole might have placed in the unresolved final canvas in the series (see cats. 6, 7). The installation encouraged the reviewers to compare sketch and painting, finding in the studies the germ of an idea and the tragic quality of genius unfulfilled. Given Cole's reluctance to place his sketches and unfinished or unresolved works in the public eye, it was the first time many of the artist's admirers had seen this aspect of his career.

The decade between 1848 and 1858 witnessed the growing presence of the oil sketch, notably the "finished sketch" as recognized works of art in exhibitions and private collections. These became favorite targets for charity auctions and other benefits, notably the Artists' Fund, and allowed artists to raise money for study abroad through occasional studio sales. The stature of the oil sketch was further enhanced by each published account extolling its painterly virtues. In 1859, when Frederic Edwin Church exhibited *Twilight, a Sketch* at the NAD (cat. 31), reviewers chewed over whether such a small, yet sophisticated painting was a sketch or a finished work. At first mention, the reviewer for the *New York Times* called it

a very striking and peculiar color-sketch of a rare and brilliant atmospheric effect. . . . Mr. CHURCH's "Twilight," a sketch (no. 384) is rather a study than a picture, and should be criticized rather as indicating the painter's marvelous aptitude at seizing the truth of color than as a piece of composition.

Having decided it was a sketch, the reviewer concluded that "there is nothing on the whole among the landscapes of the exhibition so masterly as the handling of this sketch."³ This last statement is quite astonishing: to identify an oil sketch as superior in handling to the finished landscapes hanging in the main rooms would have been unthinkable only a few years before. As a sketch, Church's contribution was exempt from the more stringent consideration of compositional sophistication and surface finish required of easel paintings; as a piece of painting, it was being heralded by some as their equal or better. With *Twilight*, a Sketch Church achieved the distinction of receiving accolades for a sketch directly compared with finished efforts by other artists, and the acknowledgment of its merits both within and outside the strictures of formal criticism.

Durand's studies from nature had opened the door for such appreciation of the oil sketch. Although his early studies were criticized for being "just sketches," minor efforts in the larger canon of landscape painting, by the mid-1850s they were acknowledged as superior to some of his more ambitious easel paintings. Durand's

painted studies, some of them the result of weeklong attention to a single small canvas, and Church's small paintings could be understood as either sketches or finished works, the criteria dependent as much on scale as on finish.

Approbation of Albert Bierstadt's oil sketches as having intrinsic worth as works of art appeared in 1863 in the *San Francisco Daily Alta California*:

Mr. Bierstadt has been very industrious and has taken a multitude of sketches, which though made in six or eight hours each, have an excellence that would entitle them to take rank with finished pictures. Indeed, several of them are great works of art. In sketching it is admitted that Bierstadt has no equal in America. His sketches, however, are merely as guides for pictures, which will require months, perhaps years, to complete, but when completed they will be master-pieces.⁴

That oil sketches could be "great works of art" and yet serve a more humble role "as merely guides for pictures" may have been the highest praise Bierstadt received during his lifetime. It was an attitude not often declared in such straightforward terms during the nineteenth century. Ironically, the West, which in many respects lagged behind the East in its cultural development, leapfrogged ahead in its sympathy for plein-air paintings as finished, accomplished works of art.

In 1864 Matthew Vassar arranged to purchase four

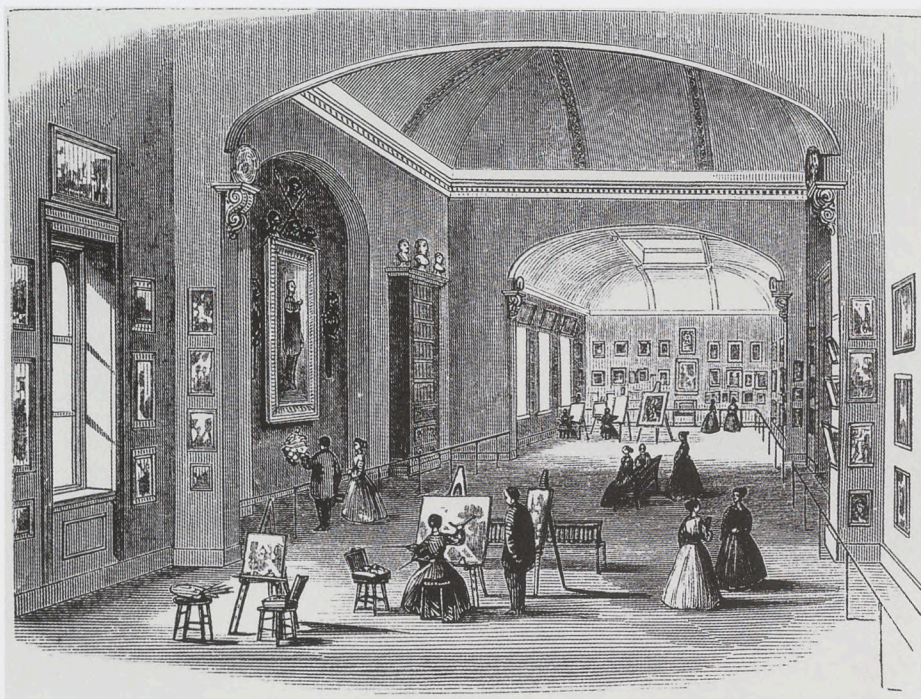


FIG. 52 "The Art Gallery." Wood engraving. From Benson J. Lossing, *Vassar College and Its Founder* (New York: C. A. Alvord, Printer, 1867), 131



FIG. 53 Part of the installation of John F. Kensett's memorial exhibition at the National Academy of Design, New York, sold 24–29 March 1873. Albumen silver print from glass negative, $10\frac{3}{8} \times 15\frac{1}{8}$ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum Accession, 1989. (1989.1011.4)

thousand works of art owned by the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon for his newly chartered Vassar College. As a result, Magoon's collection of one hundred oil sketches and small paintings by the leading American landscape painters formed the earliest museum collection of works of this smaller scale.⁵ Placed on view in the college's gallery, they provided access to works of art in an educational setting (fig. 52). Inspired by Yale's Trumbull Gallery, Vassar went a step further, establishing a formal art-education program centered on this collection.⁶ Not until the Cooper Union in New York (now the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum) began acquiring significant collections of artists' sketches in the early twentieth century did such work again move with similar purpose into a museum setting.⁷ Whether it was recognized at the time or only in retrospect, slowly and steadily the criteria for awarding merit to a work of art encompassed the sketch as it did a finished painting.

The aftermath of John Frederick Kensett's untimely death in 1872 made apparent the extent of the changes that had taken place in the consideration of the oil sketch.

Kensett died in his studio on a Saturday, when he held open house, and was found there by friends who had come calling, including Samuel P. Avery and Daniel Huntington. He was genuinely mourned by his friends. His life was recounted in numerous flattering obituaries, and his body lay in state at the National Academy of Design. Kensett's memorial occurred in three phases, beginning with a meeting of the Century Association on 20 December and a retrospective exhibition at the NAD the following March (fig. 53), prior to the public executor's sale. The Academy exhibition was an overwhelming experience:

The Collection filled the entire Academy of Design—literally filled every foot of the walls of all the rooms; and it was not all on exhibition, either, for the spaces gave out before the pictures did. There were upward of a thousand in all. Out of this number six hundred and ninety-four sold at auction, of which less than fifty were by other artists.⁸

The sensory overload that must have accompanied such a display of a single artist's work did not discourage

buyers during the six-day executor's sale, which netted over \$130,000.⁹ The *New York Daily Tribune* reported each day's sales results in the following day's edition, listing each work with its purchaser and price.¹⁰ The sale brought higher prices than expected, as much a reflection of Kensett's general popularity and the grief felt by his friends as of the intrinsic worth of his oeuvre.

Artists' estate sales were generally noted for the unexpectedly high prices paid for paintings, sketches, and even hastily scribbled drawings. It was not a phenomenon confined to this side of the ocean, as accounts of numerous Continental and British artists' studio sales attest. Rationalizing the fervor with which even the most minor sketches were sought, a British writer covering the sale of the contents of Sir Edwin Landseer's studio in 1874 noted:

The enormous prices fetched by the roughest sketches and hasty jottings in note-books, at the Landseer sale, will astonish even those who are used to the appreciation now accorded to the slightest efforts of any master whom the world has agreed to call great. This appreciation is not altogether false, for it is possible that the slightest sketch of such a man, however hasty it may appear, is the outcome of years of patient study and trained observation, and so will have more worth than the carefully-executed work of an inferior master.¹¹

Private comments tended to be more blunt. The sudden interest in Achille-Etna Michallon's oil sketches following his death in 1822 was the topic of a letter to the painter François-Xavier Fabre, in which L.-F. Bertin wrote: "Did you know that the rags of poor Michallon have been sold for more than sixty thousand francs! Girodet paid four hundred for a small study, for which, on the day we visited the studio, we would not have given twenty francs! Long live the dead!"¹²

Memorial exhibitions provided a unique moment at which every piece seemed charged with artistic or personal significance. Considering the exhaustive catalogue of Kensett's studio effects, the *Aldine* reviewer observed,

Kensett himself could not have desired the sale of his whole Collection, if it be true, as we have been told, that he would not sell a picture that did not satisfy him, and that he never sold his sketches. . . . As a rule the smaller the picture was, the better it

was, provided it was not the merest sketch of one. Kensett's finished sketches were admirable, but they were few in number as compared with his unfinished ones, which, for the most part, were hints that he probably understood, and possibly other artists, but nothing more. They had no value as Art, or none that a layman could perceive. The enthusiasts who bought them will dispute this proposition, no doubt, but . . . They will tire of their daubs of rocks, their bits of water, their streaks of sky and cloud, and will wish they had something better instead, which will be to wish they had understood Kensett better. . . . He attempted some things for which he was not fitted—as what artist does not?—and in these he succeeded only tolerably.¹³

Kensett's sale appeared to be an undifferentiated mass of artistic material, the entire contents of his studios. It did not seem to matter. The contents of a studio, like the contents of a house, took on significance with the passing of its owner, as though through owning a piece of what remains contact was maintained with the departed. Similarly, the memorial catalogue essays tended to eulogize all aspects of the deceased artist's life and work. Even works considered unfinished or unsuccessful found buyers. Judging from the titles and sizes of the oil sketches included in the estate sale, the prices realized were roughly double those achieved during Kensett's lifetime, as recorded in the artist's account books.¹⁴ Studies of rocks and trees measuring roughly 12 by 19 inches to 18 by 22 inches brought between \$100 and \$460. These appear to have been the finished sketches painted on his trips with Durand and John Casilear. Even small plein-air sketches, of the variety the artist reputedly never sold during his lifetime, brought impressive prices. Kensett's Colorado sketches, many of them smaller than 10 by 18 inches, consistently sold for between \$100 and \$210. *Snowy Range and Foothills from the Valley of Valmont, Colorado* (fig. 54) brought \$200.¹⁵

Adding to the interest in Kensett's estate was the disposition of thirty-eight paintings referred to collectively as the "Last Summer's Work."¹⁶ Found in the artist's summer studio on Contentment Island, Connecticut, they represented for many the tragedy of the artist struck down in the full flower of his career. Their large scale and overall uniformity of finish left many viewers puzzled whether to consider them oil sketches, unfinished paintings, or possibly finished works of a

FIG. 54 John Frederick Kensett, *Snowy Range and Foothills from the Valley of Valmont, Colorado*. Oil on canvas, 7 × 17½ in. Denver Art Museum collection, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Williams, 1975.66



highly abstract nature. Most reviewers hedged their bets and referred to them as “studies, sketches, and pictures.”¹⁷ The reviewer for the *Brooklyn Eagle* called them “thirty-four studies or sketches, and nearly all of the canvases bear the appearance of finished pictures. Thirty-four pictures painted in three months, for that was the length of Mr. Kensett’s last vacation, show remarkable industry, and we know of no other artist who possesses such facility of execution, unless it is Mr. Frederic E. Church, who is reported to have made upward of one thousand studies during his last year in the Orient.”¹⁸

At the meeting of the Century held in Kensett’s memory, the Reverend Samuel Osgood pointed to one of the paintings included in the “Last Summer’s Work” and said:

Perhaps his most remarkable picture in this series is that which presents the sea under the sunlight, with nothing else to divide the interest—no land or sail, no figure, and not even a noticeable cloud to give peculiar effect, or a rock to provoke the dash of the waves. It is pure light and water, a bridal of the sea and sky. Is it presumption in a poor novice in art like me to say that this is a great picture?¹⁹

The painting in question has been identified as *Sunset at Sea* (fig. 55), which is without doubt the most abstract of the paintings. Its impressive scale suggests that this is not a plein-air oil sketch, and its evenness of finish further suggests that it is not incomplete. Yet by the most liberal standards of the day, it is a far more abstract painting than one would expect to encounter in all but the briefest of painted sketches. Even in the context of a memorial meeting, during which sentiment is at its most effusive, such consideration as Osgood’s is noteworthy. In Kensett’s case, the sketches and un-



FIG. 55 John Frederick Kensett, *Sunset at Sea*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 28 × 41⅞ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Thomas Kensett, 1874. (74.3)

finished paintings in his studio were capable of moving an audience to declare them “great pictures,” an assessment that surely would have been withheld if these works had been discussed while the artist was alive. Yet Kensett appears to have been experimenting with a kind of tonal abstraction that was fundamentally different from the style of painting endemic to the Hudson River school era. His own purpose remains unclear, providing a tantalizing opportunity to speculate on the nature of creativity.

The fanfare surrounding Kensett’s “Last Summer’s Work” reached a climax when it was announced that the artist’s brother was donating the collection to the newly opened Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which Kensett had been a founding member.²⁰ The museum graciously accepted the gift, presenting it to the public in an exhibition held in 1874 along with a catalogue excerpting passages from the eulogies first printed in the *Memorial Catalogue*.²¹ Shortly thereafter the works were removed to storage, because the public galleries

were reserved for more finished examples of artists' works. Despite Kensett's popularity, the acquisition of so many paintings by a single artist was not met with universal praise.²² The museum faced a now-familiar dilemma when confronted with an artist's sketches, attempting to find a balance between representing all facets of an artist's mature work and becoming a repository for works of greater interest to the scholar than to the public.

The settling of an artist's estate was an emotionally charged event, left as it often was to the deceased artist's friends to assist the family with the task of cleaning out the studio. Sanford Robinson Gifford's death in 1880 was as devastating as Kensett's passing. Jervis McEntee helped the family catalogue paintings for inclusion in the memorial exhibition, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the subsequent estate sale.²³ His principal task was to sort through the sketches and select those that needed to be mounted or framed for display. In his diary he noted: "It seemed very strange to be looking over his sketches in this way for everything in the room was just as he had left it and it did not seem possible he was never to return. We took down some sketches from the walls and which had been familiar to me there for years and it seemed almost like sacrilege to do it."²⁴ Between 7 and 16 October McEntee and John F. Weir hung the 160 paintings and sketches in the exhibition.²⁵ On 19 November the Century held its memorial meeting, organized by McEntee and Worthington Whitredge, among others, which included another sixty-two paintings.²⁶ Unlike Kensett's memorial exhibition at the Academy, Gifford's was a more selective affair, culled from the vast amount of material found in his studio. The estate auction, held in two parts during April 1881, sold 294 works for a total of roughly forty thousand dollars.²⁷

A reviewer of the Gifford memorial exhibition commented on the oil sketches, comparing them to the adjacent finished paintings. Of the sketches he noted:

Looking through the collection of the Museum one found . . . many that were intrinsically much better—not so individually in aim, perhaps, but more complete as works of art; not so grand in their intentions, but more satisfying in their results. A number of hasty outdoor studies, usually of sea-shore bits, were especially good, broad in handling and agreeable in texture.²⁸

The merits Gifford's admirer perceived in the sketches call attention to the changing parameters of art criticism. Gifford's brushwork contained lively, animated passages of forms sculpted in loose impasto, diminutive people and other signs of habitation stippled in with tiny yet evocative dots of pure color. The overall surface, vibrant in color and handling, found increased favor with a generation coming of age with an appreciation of Barbizon precepts.

Between 1872 and 1880 the New York art world underwent a profound aesthetic and economic shift. With the deaths of Kensett and Gifford landscape painting lost two of its most progressive painters, each of whom seemed to be seeking a form of abstraction that would emerge instead in the studios of the "tonalist" painters, among them George Inness, Alexander Helwig Wyant, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, and John F. Weir. In 1873, amid a stock market crash and general economic decline some associated with Reconstruction,²⁹ the Academy began to founder, first financially and then between 1873 and 1875 from internal bickering. In 1873 only a quarter of the Academicians sent works to the NAD, and few sent their best works, preferring private sales through galleries or their own studios. Artists like McEntee, whose sales had flagged, vocally resented the defections,³⁰ while more successful artists like Church, Gifford, and Bierstadt remained silent.³¹ The situation improved slightly the following year, but early in 1875 the NAD resurrected an earlier prohibition against accepting "all works of art that have been previously exhibited in the city of New York," a resolution that had passed in 1847 but allowed to lapse intermittently during the intervening decades. A new resolution formally prohibiting the submission of any work of art previously displayed "at any Club or other reception" precipitated Gifford's temporary resignation and an uproar that seriously damaged the Academy among its members.³² The resolution was overturned on a vote taken in April, but the damage had been done.³³ By 1876 McEntee stated the obvious: "We are more and more impressed with the fact that we shall ultimately have to get more dealers to interest themselves in our work or we shall sink out of sight."³⁴

The appeal of the painted sketch increased with the inevitable weakening of the Academy structure. The concurrent shift in taste away from Pre-Raphaelite and Ruskinian aesthetics meant a greater enthusiasm for tonalist canvases, painted by devotees of the ideals

espoused by Barbizon painters. Faced with the dual threats of competition from commercial entrepreneurs and defections from within, the National Academy of Design developed a reputation for conservatism. After repeated clashes with the Academy's hanging committee, a distinguished group of artists that included the Academician John LaFarge and William Morris Hunt considered forming a rival organization. In 1875 none of LaFarge's submissions to the NAD were accepted, prompting the artist and dealer Daniel Cottier to host in his gallery a Salon des Refusés for artists whose works had been rejected. Two years later, when Augustus Saint-Gaudens submitted to the NAD a plaster maquette for one of his sculptures, the hanging committee deemed it too "sketchy." Fed up with the old-guard attitudes and hanging policies of the NAD, a group of disaffected artists rallied around Saint-Gaudens and formed the Society of American Artists (SAA) as a counterpoint to the Academy.³⁵ Its leaders applauded the merits of sketches in all media as sparks of genius requiring no further elaboration to clarify the message within. *Sketchiness* was as vague a term as *truth*, but for the NAD, then under the guidance of Huntington and Whittredge, it encapsulated the negative feelings toward specific modernist tendencies extolling "effect" and "suggestion" over more literal representation of form. The Academy was caught in a generation gap, its membership and supporters a group of artists more entrenched than many of those who affiliated themselves with the new organization.

The issue central to the debate over sketches was that of finish versus completion. Clarence Cook, who supported the SAA and who would become the most influential critic of the late nineteenth century, had thrown down the gauntlet early in 1855 when he wrote, "Small sketches of landscape are capable of producing impressive effects, beyond the power of large and finished pictures. Particularly this is the case if they are sketches begun and completed out of doors, and never touched again."³⁶ The *Crayon* took issue with Cook's examples of brilliant sketches and was appalled at his temerity in declaring Durand and Gifford "weak" and Church "wearisome." The same article castigated the unnamed art reviewers employed by the *Times* and the *Tribune* for expressing similar opinions. However, the *Times* critic's avowed preference for "the inexhaustible treasures of the imagination" over strict "fidelity to external Nature" as the proper subject of landscape

painting marked the path that the genre would follow in the last decades of the century.

Ironically, the midcentury preference for "finished" oil sketches had had the effect of keeping the more abstract, painterly sketches by the same artists out of the public domain. Now taste was changing to appreciate the very abstract qualities in those private sketches. In 1878 Inness attempted to explain his approach to painting, writing, "A work of art does not appeal to the intellect. It does not appeal to the moral sense. Its aim is not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion."³⁷ Inness's declaration argued for a shift in the criteria used for aesthetic judgment and appreciation of a painting. This shift was away from the admiration of what the *Times's* critic called "extrinsic labor" as the primary standard of success toward the acceptance of abstraction of forms as a means of communicating deeper emotional and spiritual content. Surface finish no longer sufficed to make a work of art complete or successful. More important, Inness identified as the arbiter of this assessment the evidence of the artist's hand, the brushstroke, rather than the nominal subject the artist chose as his vehicle. The opportunity to review the careers of Kensett and Gifford offered casual viewers and art theorists alike a means to consider both ends of this spectrum of the artists' approach to painting. The general response favored the most painterly and visually abstract evocations of nature. Like Inness, John F. Weir believed that "the question of finish is merely a relative one, and, if the intention of the artist is attained, the picture may perhaps be properly termed finished."³⁸ Weir, as head of Yale's art school, phrased his thoughts more diplomatically than did Inness, but with equal conviction.

The shift in taste away from the Hudson River school ethos did not occur as a specific result of the Civil War or any other single historical event. It developed slowly, a confluence of factors involving accelerated western expansion and eastern industrialization and the concomitant adjustments and maturation of American political and social thought. In Henry James's view, the meaning of landscape shifted from national and cultural prerogatives to issues of personal epiphany.³⁹ By the time of the centennial exhibition in Philadelphia, an event designed to take a fond look backward while charting a course for the future, the organizers of the art exhibition had little interest in commemorating the past. The artist-organizers, including Weir, accentuated the shift in taste, both in the selection and installation of



FIG. 56 Asher B. Durand's studio, Maplewood, N.J., ca. 1878. © Collection of The New-York Historical Society

American and European paintings and in Weir's published comments in the guidebook. By placing American and European paintings together, Weir and his committee provided a sympathetic context for their ideas about nature as reflective of inner spirituality. Four years later, Gifford's obituary and memorial exhibition enabled Weir to expand on his thoughts. He proclaimed that Gifford's subject was, in effect, an abstract idea rendered visible through forms, a conceptual framework one step beyond the more literal precepts governing most Hudson River-era paintings.⁴⁰ His pronouncement, like Inness's declaration quoted above, indicated that the first major political battle over the principles of painting styles in America encompassed a philosophical change at the core of landscape painting, one that effortlessly absorbed the ethos of the oil sketch as a highly personal, internalized interpretation of nature. The painterly sketch answered Inness's criterion for a successful work of art.

This change in climate left the surviving members of the Hudson River school era distinctly out of fashion, as may be measured by the estate sale held in 1887 for Durand. A photograph of Durand's Maplewood, New Jersey, studio (fig. 56) shows walls lined with a good number of his studies from nature, many of which may

be identified from the sale records. As was the case with most memorial exhibitions and subsequent sales, there were selected easel paintings borrowed from private collectors as well as the studio effects. Church noted, "There was a sale of Durand's studies etc. which did not bring so much as they ought. I think it was in a great measure owing to the fact that a number of his finest pictures were borrowed to give interest to the Exhibition."⁴¹ Church's interpretation misses, or deliberately downplays, the more significant reason for the sale's lackluster results. By 1887 the Hudson River school aesthetic was in eclipse. Its two most promising artists, Kensett and Gifford, were both dead, and Durand was viewed as a relic from an earlier era. Most of the patrons who had helped establish Durand's reputation were also gone, and the younger collectors and dealers preferred a more modern aesthetic in both American and European art. Of the older landscape painters, Church was essentially retired, Bierstadt was out of favor, and McEntee and Whittredge were painting works owing their character more to Barbizon than to Claude.

Indicative of that shift was the critics' renewed praise for Church's and Bierstadt's smaller efforts. In 1867 Henry Tuckerman had seen in Bierstadt's sketches

"studies of American scenery full of bold and true significance . . . character and masterly effects. . . . His portfolios contain a large number of careful and elaborate studies, and every interval of leisure has been and is still devoted to the study and transcript of natural phenomena."⁴² In 1880 S. G. W. Benjamin wrote, "Bierstadt's smaller California scenes are generally more valuable than his large ones for artistic quality," and to make his point he illustrated one of Bierstadt's small finished works titled *View on the Kern River* (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond).⁴³ Such attention brought criticism of Bierstadt's works full circle. From the early notices of *Lake Lucerne* to the late pictures of California, critics homed in on the appealing nature of the smaller works, both sketches and small finished paintings. Like Church, Bierstadt had outlived his artistic era and was criticized for clinging to an outmoded, oversized idiom in an age fascinated by the plein-air look of American impressionism and the inward-looking qualities of tonalism. Praise for studies and smaller works cushioned the blows only slightly. An artist once lauded for his epic canvases found little solace in appreciation redirected toward his painted sketches, and in triumphs of a personal, rather than public nature.

Church may well have recognized this. As Olana took shape, he absented himself more frequently from the New York art world, acknowledging that changing tastes were becoming more critical of his style. To Heade, who acted as caretaker of Church's studio during the latter's lengthy absences, Church wrote, "I have my own views as to which of my pictures I want exhibited and—twixt you and I—I prefer generally to keep out of Public places."⁴⁴ Implicit in this remark is Church's reluctance to allow his late oil sketches to stand in for his larger easel paintings. As he grew older, Church continued to paint increasingly vibrant and dynamic oil sketches, but in his easel paintings he did not abandon the style he had perfected during the 1850s. Ideologically, Church stood far from the Barbizon-inspired canvases that were finding increasing favor with patrons and critics. Never one to exhibit his field sketches, Church remained consistent on this point; however, as his reputation waned, he ceased exhibiting his finished sketches as well. He did not share in the excitement surrounding impressionism, heartily disliking the "raw" effects prized by so many. In a letter to one of his patrons, Charles Parsons, Church expressed his feelings:

I hope that you have not been much impressed by the "Impressionists"—That sort of Art is really but one phase of Decorative Art and so easily acquired that the very pertinent question was asked in one of our Journals Why the works of the pupils were so often confounded with those of the masters—It is really very superficial, all on the surface which accounts for the sudden springing up of a crowd of young geniuses fully arrived—There have been several ephemeral outbursts of the same sort during the past 300 years—but nothing remains not even ashes.⁴⁵

That impressionism owed some of its revolutionary character and painterly verve to the Barbizon rebels of a generation earlier, and some of its acceptance to the belated appreciation of Barbizon works in America, did not sway Church. Returning from Mexico after the winter of 1890, Church stopped in Thomasville, Georgia, where he encountered Inness. In a particularly snide comment, the master of the Hudson River school had this to say of his Barbizon-inspired contemporary: "Geo. Inness is here and thinks it very attractive for the Artist—as his theory is—'Subject is nothing treatment makes the picture' I can believe he is satisfied."⁴⁶ Church's deliberately pejorative recasting of Inness's beliefs makes apparent the unbridgeable gulf between the Hudson River school and the men following the paths of Barbizon.

John Constable once described a sketch as "That which you were at the time." His statement recognizes the immediacy and temporally fleeting character of the oil sketch, in studied contrast with the timelessness of a morally inflected landscape.⁴⁷ Considering them in this light, Malcolm Cormack has interpreted Constable's late oil sketches, dense and impenetrable to all but the artist compared to his early plein-air efforts, as a private dialogue addressing his life's work.⁴⁸ Church's late works, like Constable's, are self-referential, a nonverbal summation of the artist's career. They also remind us that an oil sketch acquires its meaning as a reference point within an artist's oeuvre only in retrospect. At the time of its making, it was not a preliminary sketch for anything, but a singular record of a moment experienced.

As tastes for painting in the art world moved away from an appreciation of his Great Pictures, Church spent less time away from his home at Olana. High above the Hudson River, he turned his attention to sketching a

new set of impressions. There was no need to translate any of these into a finished painting, as the progress on the actual landscape represented a new and different form of completion. Early in January 1871 Church wrote to Heade, "I am appalled at the vast accumulation of sketches. If I should live and sketch 20 years longer, I should have a pile [illeg.] It is I have so many that I can never get an opportunity to see them—Advice to a young Artist—don't make sketches."⁴⁹ Church's mock-exasperation with his own enthusiasm for sketching is typical of the buoyant tenor of his correspondence with Heade as Olana took shape. More important, his recognition that he was creating sketches that he then might not need to see again also underscored their independence from his continuing, albeit limited production of easel paintings after 1869. The oil sketches were fast becoming a separate oeuvre—once completed, considered finished. They were also becoming more abstract, the artist's painterly shorthand deftly abbreviating that with which he was already so familiar.

In his biographical sketch on Church, Tuckerman had singled out Church's sky sketches for specific praise.⁵⁰ His late sketches, painted during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, chronicle Church's lifelong fascination with atmospheric phenomena. A number of Church's sunsets from these final decades exhibit a freedom of handling unprecedented in his work. *Sunset; Color Effects* (fig. 57) rivals Constable's sketches for its freely painted clouds and dabs of color, used to capture the final seconds of light at sunset. In *Summer Sunset from Olana* (fig. 58), dated May 1874, Church's effusive brushwork and emotional response to the sunset are unquestionably the subject of the small work.⁵¹

The most unusual and intriguing of these late efforts is a sunset painted on thin board (cat. 45). The lurid colors are squeezed from the tubes, manipulated only slightly by the brush, to create a highly charged, expressive vista. Close attention to this work reveals its subject to be a sunset as seen from Olana, the tree and pond recognizable alongside Church's more topographically detailed sketches. In its bravura manner and explosive brushwork and color, this sketch of all of Church's work comes closest to achieving what Constable had been after in the 1820s and Inness in the 1870s—a means of capturing the experience of nature rather than its detailed forms and using the sketch to live those sensations anew. Constable's search to become a natural painter is finally realized in America in this small, pri-

vate painting that encodes raw emotion in a language of color nearly inaccessible to the outside viewer. The restless fluidity and explosive nature of the brushwork in these sketches is like a bolt of energy being dissipated. With vivid strokes of purple, orange, green, and red, Church captured a moment so private as to make visible the lasting barrier between artist and viewer. In it the core of mystery surrounding the creation of a work of art is still shrouded from easy understanding.

For Church to have painted this expressive sunset illuminates the vast gulf between the artist's public and private works, and between his distilled artistic vision and "that which Church was" at a particular moment of perception. The oil sketches he painted during the waning years of his life expressed a highly personal, emotionally charged response to the landscape—not for the public, and not in the service of an ideology, but for himself. Although Church might never have recognized it, *Evening Twilight* embodies the spirit of Inness's call for an art for art's sake, art created to awaken an emotion rather than to teach a lesson. That non-narrative, purely emotive aspect had always been an intrinsic quality of the oil sketch, one that attracted greater interest and higher regard from collectors and critics alike as the century drew to a close.

In the hands of many American landscape painters, the oil sketch helped the artist to learn the concrete aspects of nature, its purpose being to free him to invent forms based on a solid foundation. Once considered as "evidence," the sketch developed a following for its non-scientific nature; vibrant brushwork and the suggestion of transience in fleeting effects of weather generated greater admiration than the strictly literal contours of rocks and trees. Initially deemed exempt from the same type of critical assessment reserved for Claudian-inspired easel paintings, the oil sketch gradually attracted attention for its painterly flourishes. Framed and hung as a work of art, it *became* a work of art.

The relative ease with which American artists and their patrons accepted oil sketches as independent works of art probably arose from this country's weak system of instruction and criticism. Unlike its English and French counterparts, the NAD never exerted powerful influence over an artist's training; the volume of published art criticism that focused on how an artist should paint makes clear the idiosyncratic and independent learning process that prevailed in America. Landscape painters in particular chose nature as their alternative to indoor

FIG. 57 Frederic Edwin Church, *Sunset; Color Effects*, 1870s. Oil on paperboard, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 20 in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-382



classrooms. Out of this relatively unstructured environment artists and patrons came to expect and favor less formal approaches to painting, gradually creating a climate conducive to the appreciation of painted sketches as works of art.

The oil sketches painted by nineteenth-century American landscape painters began to be considered independent works of art as early as 1850, achieving that distinction without being accompanied by an artistic or political revolution, as had been the case at Barbizon or the tumult associated with Monet's impressionist canvases. On the contrary, appreciation of the oil sketch may have had a hand in acclimating American eyes to the visual qualities of impressionist paintings from the beginning of its development. By 1880 the shift in taste in America eagerly embraced tonalist and impressionist paintings; the painted sketch was esteemed anew for its innate similarities to those more modern movements. The ramifications of such a shift became clear as artists began allowing the public glimpses of private working methods, encouraging appreciation of the sketch for its inherent strengths, more than for its role in the creation of another work of art. Increased access to and appreciation of these smaller efforts would contribute to the gradual erosion of traditionally organized compositions and by century's end, subtly alter the parameters used to define a work of art.



FIG. 58 Frederic Edwin Church, *Summer Sunset from Olana*, May 1874. Oil on academy board, 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1976.10

NOTES

1. William Gilpin, quoted in Louis Hawes, Jr., "John Constable's Writings on Art" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1963), 371-72.
2. The catalogue of the Thomas Cole memorial exhibition is reprinted as appendix 1 in Ellwood C. Parry III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 368-72.
3. "The Academy of Design. The Thirty-fourth Exhibition of the Academy of Design," *New York Times*, 20 April 1859, supplement, 2; cited in Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1:255.
4. "Artist and Author," *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, 25 September 1863. Bierstadt Scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries Collection, Gift of Joyce Randall Edwards. Cited in Gordon Hendricks "The First Three Western Journeys of Albert Bierstadt," *Art Bulletin* 46, no. 3 (September 1964): 346.
5. Ella Foshay and Sally Mills, *All Seasons and Every Light: Nineteenth-Century American Landscapes from the Collection of Elias Lyman Magoon* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1983), 7, 27 nn. 1, 3.
6. Rebecca Lawton, "The Visual Arts of the Hudson Valley: The Elias Lyman Magoon Collection at Vassar College," paper delivered at "Kindred Spirits: Nature and Culture in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Literature," symposium held at Vassar College, 19 October 1996. My thanks to Rebecca Lawton, curator of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar, for sending me a copy of her paper and giving me access to her research notes for this event.
7. The Cooper Union acquired over 500 oil sketches and around 1,000 drawings by Church from the artist's son Louis Palmer Church and his wife, Sally, in 1917. Shortly thereafter Thomas Moran gave 84 of his drawings and watercolors of Yellowstone to the museum, and in 1911 Mr. and Mrs. Charles Savage Homer presented close to 300 drawings and 22 oil paintings by Winslow Homer. See Russell Lynes, *More than Meets the Eye: The History and Collections of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), esp. 65-68.
8. "Art. The Kensett Sale," *Aldine* (6 May 1873): 107.
9. The sale netted \$137,715 according to Bartlett Cowdrey, in "The Return of John F. Kensett," *Old Print Shop Portfolio* 4, no. 6 (February 1945): 125.
10. *New York Daily Tribune*, 24-30 March 1873.
11. Quoted from the British journal the *Academy*, in "Fine Arts," *Appleton's* 11 (20 June 1874): 797.
12. Quoted in Philip Conisbee and Sir Lawrence Gowing, *Painting from Nature: The Tradition of Open-Air Oil Sketching from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981), 42. Michallon was one of Pierre-Henri Valenciennes's pupils and won the first Prix de Rome for historical landscape. His last pupil was the young Corot, who studied with Michallon briefly before the master's death. Valenciennes's painted sketches were purchased for a total of 1,951 francs, well above the presale estimate of 100 francs. Cited in Paula Rea Radisich, "Eighteenth-Century Plein-Air Painting and the Sketches of Pierre-Henri Valenciennes," *Art Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (March 1982): 103.
13. "Art. The Kensett Sale," *Aldine* (6 May 1873): 107.
14. Kensett's account book covering 1848-72 lists over 15 "Studies" that sold for \$50-\$200 and numerous "Studies" that sold for \$25-\$50. The artist's prices increased steadily over the years. Works in the estate sale with *Study* or *Sketch* in the title and measuring less than 10 inches in one direction brought \$50-210; similarly titled works measuring 10-20 inches on the smaller side brought \$100-\$460. See Kensett's account book, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA), reel N68-85, frames 465-88; "The Kensett Art Sale," *New York Daily Tribune*, 25-30 March 1873.
15. This sketch was no. 665 in the Kensett sale. Association Hall, *The Collection of over Five Hundred Paintings and Studies by the Late Mr. John F. Kensett*, catalogue of the executor's sale on 24-29 March 1873 (New York: Nemec Press Co., 1873; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1977), 38. "Kensett Art Sale," *New York Daily Tribune*, 25-30 March 1873. See also Kensett curatorial file, Denver Art Museum.
16. Initial reports cited 34 paintings so designated; by the time Kensett's brother negotiated their acquisition by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the number had increased to 38.
17. "Art Matters," *New York Herald*, 15 March 1873; quoted in Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, "The Last Summer's Work," in John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* (New York: Worcester Museum, in association with W. W. Norton and Company, 1985), 137.
18. *Brooklyn Eagle*, 16 January 1873; quoted in Roque, "The Last Summer's Work," 137. Roque also notes (148) that the unfinished passages on canvases attest to speed of execution. If these paintings did represent Kensett's three-month output for that summer, he started a new picture an average of every 3-4 days. The conservator Dianne Dwyer examined the group of paintings still in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and found 8 works with tack holes and/or unevenly painted tacking margins, evidence of plein-air work when the canvas was tacked to a board and not yet stretched. Dwyer, "John F. Kensett's Painting Technique," in Driscoll and Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master*, 166.
19. The Century Association, *Proceedings at a Meeting of the Century Association, Held in Memory of John F. Kensett, December 1872* (New York: The Century Association, 1872), 23.
20. Thomas Kensett, the artist's brother, initially suggested the museum raise \$20,000 to purchase the group from him; he eventually agreed to make the group an unrestricted gift. The negotiations were rather complex and are traced in Roque, "The Last Summer's Work," 137-40.
21. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Thirty-eight Paintings "The Last Summer's Work," of the Late John F. Kensett* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1874).
22. "It is a good feature of the museum that such collections as this are being given to it, but it appears to us rather uncertain whether it is an advantage which the trustees should accept without qualification. Specimens of the works of any good artist are of great value for study and

comparison, but with the limited space the gallery affords at present, it would seem doubtful whether a few pictures by one man may not be of as much value to the public and pupils generally, as an exhibition that should cover the entire wall of any one room. . . . These Kensett pieces are of undoubted art value, as well as pecuniary value to whoever owns them, but the idea will force itself on our minds, whether . . . it is as desirable to have 40 Kensetts as 40 paintings by a dozen different artists." "Art," *Appleton's* 265 (18 April 1875): 508.

23. In gratitude for his friendship and help in settling Gifford's estate, Gifford's widow presented McEntee with a sketch box. McEntee's diary, entry for Tuesday, 7 September 1880, AAA. He also received two sketchbooks. One of the sketchbooks is inscribed, *Presented to Jervis McEntee by Jas. Gifford in Sanford's memory / January 25, 1881*, and is now in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art (12937). The other is unlocated. See Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 161.

24. McEntee's diary, entry for Saturday, 25 September 1880, AAA; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 162. McEntee also helped name works for the estate sale and was "repairing damages" to sketches. McEntee's diary, entries for Saturday, 19 March 1881; Wednesday, 23 March 1881, and Friday, 25 March 1881, AAA. See Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 169.

25. Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 162-63.

26. The Century Association, *Gifford Memorial Meeting of the Century, Friday Evening, November 19th, 1880* (New York: The Century Association, 1880; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1974).

27. "Fine Arts. The Sandford [sic] R. Gifford Sale—Part I, Second Night" and "Fine Arts. The Sandford [sic] R. Gifford Sale—Part II, Second Night" list each picture by number, title, new owner, and price paid. The cumulative total paid for the works was given as \$40,207. Unidentified clippings. Photocopies courtesy of Dr. William H. Gerdtz; cited in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 168 n. 22.

28. M. G. van Rensselaer, "Sanford Robinson Gifford," *American Architect and Building News* 11 (11 February 1882): 64; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 104.

29. The Civil War and Reconstruction played a significant role in altering individual and national self-perception, which was an integral part of landscape's appeal as a genre. Anthony Janson outlines this argument in *Worthington Whittredge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 118, 176 ff.

30. McEntee's diary, entry for Sunday, 27 April 1873, AAA, reel D180; quoted in Garnett McCoy, "Jervis McEntee's Diary," *Archives of American Art Journal* 8, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1968): 18.

31. McEntee notes that Gifford was "not inclined to be active" in the internal Academy debate. McEntee's diary, entry for Sunday, 4 May 1873, AAA, reel D180; quoted in McCoy, *ibid.*

32. "Council Meeting Minutes," 4 January 1875, National Academy of Design Archives; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 142. See also McEntee's diary for this period; and Doreen Bolger Burke and Catherine H. Voorsanger, "The Hudson River School in Eclipse," in John K. Howat et al., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987); and Anthony Janson, "Worthington Whittredge and the Crisis of Hudson River Painting," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 28-33.

33. "Council Meeting Minutes," 26 April 1875, National Academy of Design Archives; cited in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 143.

34. McEntee's diary, entry for Thursday, 19 October 1876, AAA, reel D180; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 147.

35. Jennifer A. Martin Bienenstock, "The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists, 1877-1884" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1983), esp. 18-33.

36. Quoted and critiqued (rather disparagingly) in "Sketchings: Newspaper Critics," *Crayon* 1, no. 19 (19 May 1855): 300.

37. George Inness, "A Painter on Painting," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56 (February 1878): 458-59.

38. John F. Weir, "Group 27. Plastic and Graphic Art. Painting and Sculpture," U.S. Centennial Commission, International Exhibition, 1876, *Reports and Awards, Groups 21-27*, ed. Francis A. Walker, vol. 8 (Philadel-

phia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1877), 12; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 150.

39. Henry James, "Hawthorne," in *The Shock of Recognition*, ed. E. Wilson, rev. ed. (New York, 1955), 536; quoted in Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 118.

40. John F. Weir, "Sanford Robinson Gifford, His Life and Character as an Artist and Man," in *Gifford Memorial Meeting of the Century*, 8.

41. Church to Heade, Hudson, N.Y., 13 July 1887. AAA, reel D5. On the title page of the executor's sale catalogue, the largest type proclaims "STUDIES IN OIL." Smaller type describes engravings and illustrated art books for sale. All of the 80 studies from nature listed fell within the parameters of Durand's exhibition studies, measuring roughly 18 x 24 inches at the largest, with 14½ x 23½ inches the most common size.

42. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1867), 389, 396.

43. S. G. W. Benjamin, *Art in America: A Critical and Historical Sketch* (New York: Harper & Bros., Publishers, 1880), 98.

44. Church to Heade, Hudson, N.Y., 24 October 1870. AAA, reel D5.

45. Church to Charles Parsons, Hudson, N.Y., 23 April 1883. Charles Parsons Papers, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis.

46. Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, Mitchell House, Thomasville, Ga., 18 March 1890. Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, Special Collections, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art, New York.

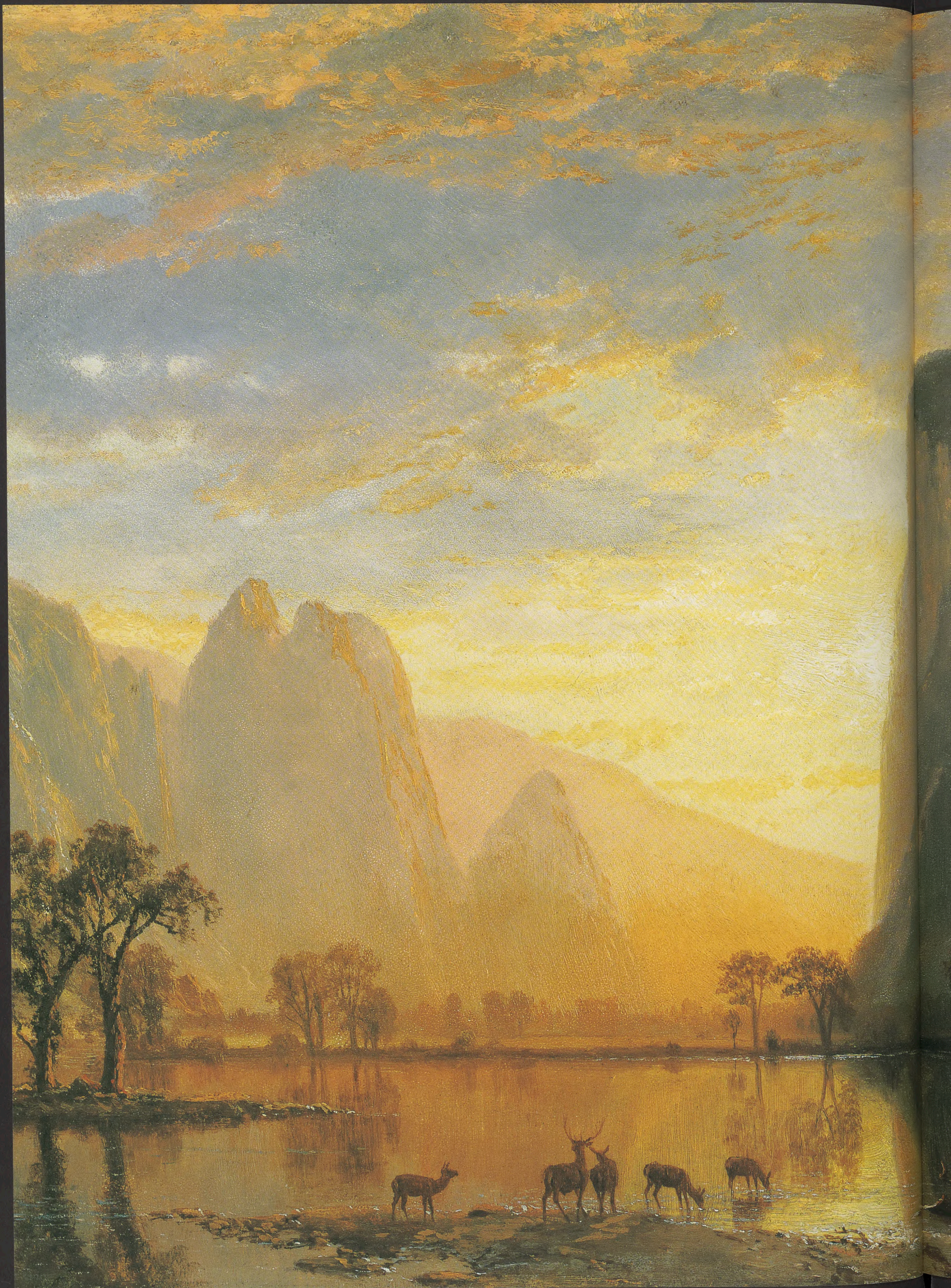
47. John Constable, *John Constable's Correspondence, Volume VI: The Fishers*, ed. R. B. Beckett (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1968), 142; quoted and assessed in Malcolm Cormack, *Constable* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 106.

48. Cormack, *ibid.*, 223.

49. Church to Heade, Hudson, N.Y., 6 January 1871. AAA, reel D5.

50. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 371.

51. Gerald Carr has raised the question whether Church's occasional rheumatism affected the looseness of the works; undoubtedly this had an intermittent impact on his ability to paint. However, Church's late oil sketches from Mexico point to his ability to wield a brush with proficiency on his good days. Several of the looser oil sketches from Olana are signed, a distinction Church would not have bestowed upon efforts with which he was not pleased. More likely he would have eschewed inscriptions in favor of works created on evenings when his wrist was not a hindrance. See Carr, *Olana*, 1:399.





Catalogue

NOTE TO THE READER

The catalogue entries for the works in the exhibition are arranged by artist, their sequence determined by the order in which each made a name for himself painting landscapes. Hence the general order is Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, John Frederick Kensett, Frederic Edwin Church, Jasper Francis Cropsey, Jervis McEntee, Sanford Robinson Gifford, Albert Bierstadt, and Worthington Whittredge. Each artist's sketches are presented chronologically. All of the signatures and inscriptions noted in the entries are in the artist's hand, with the exception of cats. 71, 74, 78–80, and 83–86 where the signature appears to be inconsistent with the date of the picture. Where it is appropriate, two or more works share an entry, whether or not those works are by the same artist. This ordering provides the reader with a roughly chronological development of the oil sketch; by arranging the artists in the order of their emergence in the art world, the reader may apprehend the developments among the group as a whole. A complete exhibition checklist by artist appears before the index.



Thomas Cole

CAT. 1

Campagna di Roma (study for *Aqueduct near Rome*), 1832

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 8½ × 11½ in.

Signed lower left: T.C.

Alexander Gallery, New York



FIG. 59 Thomas Cole,
Aqueduct near Rome, 1832.
Oil on canvas, $44\frac{1}{2} \times 67\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Washington University
Gallery of Art, St. Louis,
University purchase, Bixby
Fund, by exchange, 1987

Between February and early June 1832 Cole sketched Rome and its environs. Fascinated with the morality lessons implicit in the ruins, and heartened by nature's steady reclamation of fallow ground, Cole spent considerable time sketching the remains of the Claudian aqueducts on the Campagna in preparation for painting *Aqueduct near Rome* later that year (fig. 59). Although the bulk of his sketches of the ruins were made in pencil, *Campagna di Roma* is a plein-air oil sketch painted on paper with exuberant wet-on-wet flourishes. On the left is the Tor Fiscale, a medieval tower joining the two principal branches of the ancient watercourse.¹ The brooding, derelict tower anchors the now-fragmented row of arches stretching toward the Apennine and Sabine hills in the distance. Unlike Cole's studio-painted sketches, here there are no pencil lines visible underneath the paint (see cat. 2). Instead he worked directly on the paper, rapidly applying small strokes of paint to sculpt the landscape and aqueduct on top of broad strokes of thin paint in the sky. The addition of more turbulent, brilliantly lit clouds enhances the play of light across these forms. As was the case with many of his oil sketches, this work is an apparent blending of direct observation and artistic reflection. The anecdotal human activity in the form of a shepherd and his flock is a narrative gloss Cole frequently added to his finished Italianate paintings.

1. See the author's entry on *Aqueduct near Rome*, in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., et al., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760–1914* (New York: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 260–61.



Thomas Cole

CAT. 2

Sketch for *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow)*, 1836
Oil and pencil on composition board, 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.
Mr. and Mrs. Stuart P. Feld

The genesis and development of Cole's monumental painting known as *The Oxbow* (see fig. 5) have been well documented. In addition to using his own pencil sketches (made both on-site and after the fact), the artist relied on a published etching of the riverine feature, a demonstration of his willingness to borrow from other artistic sources in the service of his own invention.² Thus, it appears that Cole painted this small oil sketch for *The Oxbow* in his studio as he established the composition and, more important, the color balance and internal rhythm of the easel painting.

Cole included his self-portrait in the foreground of *The Oxbow*, complete with an oil sketch attached to his portable easel. Yet the view seen in the sketch within the painting is not the same as that in the work under discussion. The oil sketch for *The Oxbow* depicts the same vantage point as the finished painting and the artist's on-site pencil drawing (fig. 60), witnessed from a higher elevation than that afforded by Cole's secluded spot within the picture. A squiggle of paint in the lower right foreground of this oil sketch appears almost human, perhaps a first suggestion of the artist's presence in

2. Cole's use of Basil Hall's etching is discussed at length in Alan Wallach, "Making a Picture of the View from Mount Holyoke," in *A Special Issue: The Drawings of Thomas Cole, Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 66, no. 1 (1990): 35–46.

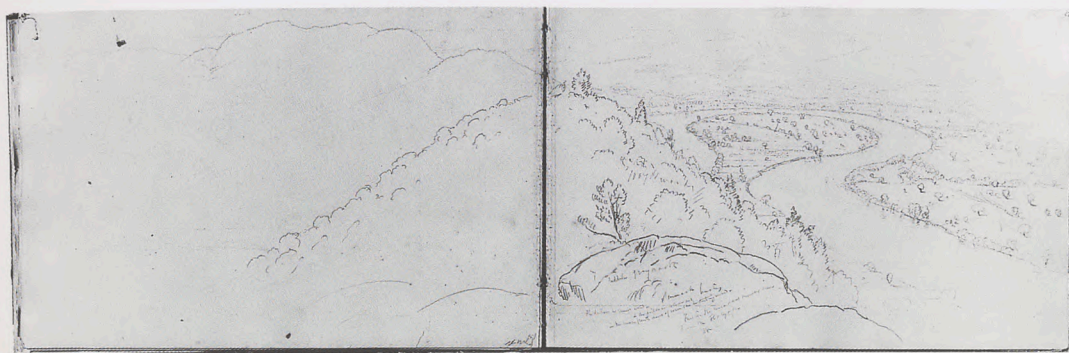


FIG. 60 Thomas Cole, *Panorama of the Oxbow on the Connecticut River, as Seen from Mount Holyoke*, ca. 1833. Graphite on paper, $8\frac{7}{8} \times 13\frac{3}{4}$ in. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, William H. Murphy Fund, 39.566.67

the landscape. In the finished painting, Cole moved himself deeper into the landscape, so that nature literally envelops him. The color sketch within the painting would be a much different composition based on the artist's placement amid the trees. Even the location of the camp stool and closed umbrella, planted like a flag to attract attention to the artist at work, is not the spot from which the oil sketch under discussion could have been made.

Cole's sketch for *The Oxbow* bears the hallmarks of studio facture. The surface is free of the flyspecks and debris common to plein-air paintings and lacks the types of damage all too characteristic of transit from the field, such as fingerprints and smudges in the wet paint. Cole's use of pencil to delineate the structural elements of the composition is the province of both field and studio, but his use of the pencil here implies the latter. Calligraphic pencil lines visible under the thin, vibrantly brushed paint set forth the essential curves and proportions of the landscape and riverbed, more freely drawn than in any of the artist's more meticulous pencil drawings made on the spot or after Basil Hall's print. In the sky Cole drew a small but pronounced dot with his pencil, which he used to orient the mass of clouds distributed around it. His placement of this dot reveals his concern for achieving a balance between the areas of land and sky. That concern, together with the loose structure of underlying penciled contours, is a hallmark of his studio practice in which his oil sketches served as preliminary studies for easel paintings.



Thomas Cole

CAT. 3

Study for "Dream of Arcadia," 1838

Oil on panel, 8¾ × 14½ in.

Signed upper right: *T Cole / 1838*

The New-York Historical Society, New York; Gift of the children of Asher B. Durand, through John Durand, 1903

Following their trip to Schroon Lake in 1837, Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand continued to correspond, their letters illuminating a deepening friendship as they shared insights on theory and practice.³ In particular, the two artists discussed the difficulties they encountered composing paintings of allegorical significance. *Dream of Arcadia* (Denver Art Museum) presented a host of problems for Cole, specifically with regard to figure painting. In a letter to Durand, Cole alluded to his struggles as he worked, inventing a metaphorical narrative in which the aspects of the painting came to life as actual obstacles to his progress:

I took a trip to Arcadia in a dream—At the first start the atmosphere was clean & the travelling delightful; but just as I got into the midst of that famous land there came a Classic Fog—and I got lost and bewildered—I scraped my shins in scrambling up a high Mountain—rubbed my nose against a marble temple—got half suffocated by the smoke from an Altar where the priests were burning offal by way of sacrifice—queer taste the Gods had that certain—knocked my head against the Arch of a Stone Bridge—was tossed & tumbled in a Cataract—just escaped—fell flat on my back among high grass—and was near getting hung up on some tall trees—but the worst of all *is* the Inhabitants of that . . . country—I found them very *troublesome very*—They have almost murdered me—Alas! I am in their hands yet—but I hope to dispose of them one by one if I have fair play & have them hung as a *striking* Example in the Exhibition of the National Academy by hangmen of our acquaintance.⁴

At some point after Cole had entertained Durand with this fanciful description of his plight, he presented his friend with a small trompe-l'oeil oil sketch for the painting. *Study for "Dream of Arcadia"* is painted to resemble a wet oil sketch on paper tacked down to a board, its damp edges beginning to curl. As an exercise in trompe-l'oeil effects, the sketch borrows elements from still life, the illusion extending to the faux woodgrain and knothole of the painted backing board. A gesture of triumph, the sketch is a trophy wrested from the hazards described in Cole's dream. In presenting it to Durand, Cole may have intended this sketch as an encouragement to his new-found friend and colleague to persevere in the face of difficulties in painting such an ambitious subject.

3. "Have you not found (I have) that I never succeeded in painting scenes, however beautiful, immediately on returning from them. I must wait for time to draw a veil over the common details, the unessential parts which shall leave the great features, whether the beautiful, the sublime, dominant in the mind." Cole to Durand, Catskill, 4 January 1838. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 7, New York Public Library (NYPL).

4. Cole to Durand, Catskill, 20 March 1838. Thomas Cole Papers, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Services Division, Albany (NYSL). Also quoted in Ellwood C. Parry III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 203.

Thomas Cole

Camp stool used by the artist, ca. 1840

Wood, metal, and ingrain carpet, $30\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2} \times 16$ in.

Bronck Museum, Greene County Historical Society,

Coxsackie, N.Y., Gift of Edith Cole Silberstein

(not illustrated)

The existence of a camp stool and portable sketch box belonging to Cole is direct evidence of the artist's working *en plein air*. In his journal for August 1831, while in Italy, Cole wrote that he set out for a ten-day sketching trip to Volterra with Henry Greenough and Christopher Pearse Cranch, "sallying forth with my sketch book or paint Box every morning at five and never returning until night."⁵ On the inside of the lid of this sketch box Cole painted an Italianate landscape *capriccio*. The fallen columns bear witness to the passing of empire, while on a low hill in the distance an intact temple still commands the surrounding countryside. The oversized boulder and bountiful foliage attest to the indomitable power of nature, gradually reclaiming man's works.

The interior of this sketch box is designed to accommodate the artist's palette, paints, brushes, and either panels or pasteboards for sketching. Although Cole painted the interior of the lid, there is still room for a wet sketch to be fastened in place by turning the four small brass flanges fixed to the lid's inner rim. Whether Cole embellished the lid on one of his sojourns in Italy or painted this scene as a fond recollection of his two trips there is unknown; certainly the technique of sketching with such a box resting on the knees was common among landscape painters of all nationalities throughout the nineteenth century.⁶

5. Cole's journal, Thomas Cole Papers, box 4, folder 4, NYSL.

6. Constable described one of his own plein-air efforts as "done in the lid of my box on my knees as usual." Constable to Fisher, 5 January 1825; quoted in Malcolm Cormack, *Constable* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 159.

Thomas Cole

CAT. 4

Sketch box used by the
artist, ca. 1840
Mahogany with brass fit-
tings, $2\frac{1}{2} \times 17 \times 13$ in.
Bronck Museum, Greene
County Historical Society,
Coxsackie, N.Y., Gift of
Edith Cole Silberstein



Thomas Cole

CAT. 5

The Ruins at Taormina, 1842

Oil and pencil on board, 12 × 16½ in.

Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc., New York

Climbing to the summit of Mount Etna was one of Cole's goals for his second trip to Italy, in 1842. Between 10 and 16 May, Cole ascended the summit and sketched the smoking volcano from numerous vantage points.⁷ During that week he painted this plein-air oil sketch of the volcano from the Greek amphitheater at Taormina, overlooking the harbor. *The Ruins at Taormina* occupies a singular niche in Cole's oeuvre: the bright overcast weather conditions Cole painted in this sketch prevented him from seeing clearly the volcanic cone that would figure prominently in all six of his known easel paintings of the subject (fig. 61). The low banks of clouds are typical of the local weather after 8 or 9 A.M., when Mount Etna is often shrouded in mist or low cloud cover. Hence guidebooks suggested that visitors climb the steep sides of the mountain overnight, to witness an unobstructed view of the harbor and surrounding countryside at dawn.⁸ The view of the summit of Mount Etna from the Greek amphitheater at Taormina was subject to similar caveats, and Cole would have had to have climbed to the amphitheater before dawn to improve his chances of painting the volcano unobstructed.

It is highly unlikely Cole would have considered painting a major work such as Mount Etna without a clear view of the volcanic cone and the attendant plume of white smoke issuing from its caldera. The overcast conditions shown in the oil sketch, then, provide circumstantial evidence of Cole's continual, if sporadic, plein-air work. Cole began the sketch with light pencil lines, establishing the levels of cloud cover and the outline of the volcano. The predominantly wet-on-wet surface of the sketch attests to the artist's rapid delineation of forms, with little amplification added after the surface layer had dried. The columns and fallen stones in the amphitheater began as strokes of pure white paint, the pigment gradually mixing with the still-wet browns and greens applied but minutes before. Cole then used thick impasto to reassert the highlights.

In this sketch the light strikes the columns within the amphitheater from the east, but it does not appear to be the light of early morning, as the shadows are short and the sun has already risen above the east-facing hills to touch the landscape along the coast. The opaque cloud cover and silvery gray sky offer only glimpses of the volcano's outline. For Cole to have decided to paint this overcast view suggests he was running out of time and opportunity to capture the scene in oils, and that after reaching the amphitheater he was reluctant to leave without something to show for his efforts. *The Ruins at Taormina* may have been intended as a plein-air study for Cole's later use, but the vagaries of the weather transformed it into a singular recollection of a specific, if not ideal, day of outdoor sketching.

7. See the author's entry for *Mount Etna from Taormina*, in Stebbins et al., *The Lure of Italy*, 262–64.

8. See, for instance, Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Southern Italy and Sicily* (London: John Murray, 1858).



FIG. 61 Thomas Cole,
Mount Etna from Taormina,
1843. Oil on canvas, 78 $\frac{5}{8}$ \times
120 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Wadsworth Ath-
eneum, Hartford, Connecti-
cut, Purchased from the
artist by Daniel Wadsworth
for the Wadsworth Ath-
eneum, assisted by Alfred
Smith, 1844.6



Thomas Cole

CAT. 6

The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey (study for series *The Cross and the World*), ca. 1846–48

Oil on canvas, 12 × 18 in.
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



Cole died before completing his five-canvas epic *The Cross and the World*, but after his death the four unfinished canvases and five preliminary oil sketches went on public view in his memorial exhibition. The allegory's premise was the consequences faced by two youths with a choice of path and destiny—a choice between following the way of the cross or the way of the world—made in the first painting. The order in which the finished works were to be hung emphasized the polarities between the choices made by the youthful protagonists, as the first canvas was to occupy the center and the pair of paintings for the Pilgrim of the Cross hung to the left and the pair of paintings for the Pilgrim of the World to the right of this opening scene.⁹

The five oil sketches indicated how hard Cole worked to integrate each painting into an overarching narrative. As one reviewer faced with the unfinished series admitted, "Nor should we be wholly able to speak of its merits as a poetic composition, were not the original sketches placed beneath the pictures, and from these we can catch some faint foreshadowing of the intended conclusion of the work."¹⁰ Cole's second sketch follows the Pilgrim of the World in search of secular riches awaiting him in an Arcadian landscape reminiscent of *The Voyage of Life: Youth* (Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, N.Y.; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). The third painting, following the Pilgrim of the Cross, shows a dark, foreboding landscape in which the primary source of light is the ever-present cross guiding the true believer through the wilderness.

The series concludes with a pair of paintings depicting the end of each Pilgrim's journey: the Pilgrim of the Cross reaches salvation as he is greeted by a cascade of angels; the Pilgrim of the World faces damnation at the hands of a flock of demonic, winged skulls eager to greet him. Ever the moralist, Cole offers a final means of redemption to the Pilgrim of the World, for if the Pilgrim turns his head, he can still see the cross lighting a path across the rubble.

9. Ellwood Parry illustrates this sequence in *The Art of Thomas Cole*, 360–61.

10. "The Fine Arts. The Cole Exhibition. Second Notice," *Literary World* 3, no. 63 (15 April 1848): 207–8.



Thomas Cole

CAT. 7

*The Pilgrim of the World
at the End of His Journey*
(study for series *The Cross
and the World*) ca. 1847

Oil on canvas, 12 × 18 in.

National Museum of
American Art, Smithsonian
Institution

Although Cole had begun work on the first four paintings, the final canvas was represented by the oil sketch alone, which is described in the memorial catalogue:

Desolate and broken, the Pilgrim, descending a gloomy vale, pauses at last on the horrid brink that overhangs the outer darkness. Columns of the Temple of Mammon crumble; trees of the gardens of pleasure moulder on his path. Gold is as valueless as the dust with which it mingles. The phantom of glory—a baseless, hollow fabric—flits under the wing of death to vanish in a dark eternity. Demon forms are gathering around him. Horror-struck, the Pilgrim lets fall his staff, and turns in despair to the long-neglected and forgotten Cross. Veiled in melancholy night, behind a peak of the mountain, it is lost to his view forever.¹¹

These words may have been written by Durand, who organized Cole's retrospective in the months following his mentor's death. Although Cole advocated a less apocalyptic vision of man's fall from grace, the strength of his moral message was clear. As a capstone to Cole's career, this series summed up his aspirations for the landscape genre.

The oil sketches of the final two paintings have a freshness and sparkle that are sometimes dimmed in Cole's finished allegories: more is left to the imagination in these diminutive paintings. The winged demons in particular seem positively gleeful in their anticipation of departing with the damned soul of the Pilgrim of the World. Cole's broad strokes of dark paint over a glowing reddish brown ground lend a whiff of brimstone to the ominous sky, the energy in his brushstrokes accentuating the tension of his composition. For Cole, studio sketches like these were the true foundation of his paintings.

11. Ibid.



Asher B. Durand

CAT. 8

Study from Nature, Hoboken, N.J., ca. 1837

Oil on canvas, 11 × 14¼ in.

The New-York Historical Society, New York; Gift of the children of the artist, through John Durand, 1903.8

Two of Durand's earliest tree studies, *Study from Nature* (The New-York Historical Society, 1903.7) and this *Study from Nature, Hoboken, N.J.*, appear to have been painted shortly after the artist's trip to Schroon with Thomas Cole in June 1837. The success of Durand's trip with Cole may be measured in the satisfied tone of Cole's journal entry: "Have just returned from a tour in search of the picturesque. . . . To Mr. Durand the scenery was entirely new and I am happy in having been the means of introducing the rich & varied scenes of Schroon to a true lover of Nature."¹ In early September Durand wrote to Cole from Hoboken, expressing his intention to abandon portraiture for landscape painting:

1. Cole's journal, entry for 8 July 1837; quoted in Thomas Cole, *Collected Essays and Prose Sketches of Thomas Cole*, ed. Marshall Tynn (St. Paul, Minn.: John Colet Press, 1980), 143.

I am still willing to confess myself a Trespasser on your grounds, tho' I trust not a poacher. Landscape still occupies my attention, well if the public don't wish me to take their heads, I will, like a free horse take my own, and "ope the expanding nostril to the breeze" Now if there be a man on Earth whose locations together with whose locomotive powers I envy it is Thos. Cole. . . . the vast range of this beautiful creation should be my dwelling place, the only portion of which I can at present avail myself being the neighborhood of Hoboken, which I am permitted to strip of its trees and meadows two or three times a week, for which I am indeed thankful.²

Durand's comments to Cole about sketching trees and meadows at Hoboken so soon after their adventure at Schroon suggest that these studies were painted in 1837 rather than in 1834.³ *Study from Nature, Hoboken, N.J.* is a very loose and painterly sketch. Using a loaded brush and buttery, fluid paint, Durand applied a shimmering curtain of stippled strokes to create the mass of leaves on his trees. In an essentially monochromatic palette of greens and gray-greens, the lone touch of red in a boulder anchoring the lower left corner is a hallmark of Cole; he used small accents of bright color (notably red) to lead the eye into his compositions. Flyspecks and other inclusions attest to this work's plein-air execution. When compared with *Landscape, Sunset*, one of Durand's finished easel paintings of 1838 (fig. 62), the pronounced similarity in handling and effect strongly suggests that this sketch was painted at roughly the same time, and under Cole's guiding hand.

John Durand, the artist's son and biographer, assigned the earlier date of 1834 to these two studies when the New-York Historical Society acquired them; however, his accuracy in dating his father's work is not always reliable.⁴ John Durand helped promote the belief that his father was the first American landscape painter to paint out-of-doors, and assigning a date preceding his father's trip to Schroon would have helped support that claim.⁵ In light of Asher Durand's reliance on Cole to provide him with his tutelage in landscape painting, and Durand's evident pride in his Hoboken sketches of 1837, it seems far more likely that he painted *Study from Nature, Hoboken, N.J.* in the months following their plein-air sketching trip to Schroon.



FIG. 62 Asher B. Durand, *Landscape, Sunset*, 1838. Oil on canvas, 25 × 34 in. © Collection of The New-York Historical Society, Gift of Mrs. Lucy Maria Durand Woodman, 1907.¹⁰

2. Durand to Cole, New York, 5 September 1837. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 6, New York Public Library (NYPL).

3. In his dissertation on Durand, David Lawall quotes a letter dated 1832 in which Durand's old engraving partner Elias Wade, Jr., invited the artist to bring "not only your sketch book, but your palette, colors, canvass [*sic*], etc." as proof that Durand was an accomplished plein-air oil sketcher before 1832; however, on p. 332, Lawall notes Cole's suggestion that Durand purchase a camp stool, umbrella, and portable easel prior to their sketching trip to Schroon as indicative that Durand "had not previously attempted a serious outdoor painting expedition." Indeed, it would appear that Durand had not ventured to paint *en plein air* prior to this 1837 trip, with Wade or anyone else. See David B. Lawall, *Asher Brown Durand: His Art and Art Theory in Relation to His Times*, 4 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 1:328–29. Linda Ferber has raised the possibility that Durand may have observed Mount's method of painting *en plein air*. See Ferber, *William Trost Richards: American Landscape and Marine Painter* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980), 96.

4. Lawall has noted discrepancies of up to a decade in John Durand's dating of his father's work. See Lawall, *Asher B. Durand: Documentary Catalogue of the Narrative and Landscape Paintings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 55, no. 106. In 1915 the New-York Historical Society published a catalogue of its collection that repeated the 1834 date of execution for these two early studies.

5. In his biography of his father, John Durand does not mention Asher's request for Cole's guidance in becoming a landscape painter; the author presents his father as having pioneered the art of plein-air landscape painting on his own. See John Durand, *The Life and Times of Asher B. Durand* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894; reprint, New York: Kennedy Graphics, 1970).

Asher B. Durand

CAT. 9

Study at Marbletown, Ulster County, N.Y., ca. 1845

Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 16 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.

The New-York Historical Society, New York;

Purchase, Durr Fund, 1887.⁷

In 1844 Durand first submitted to the National Academy of Design exhibition a plein-air painting, a work titled *Study from Nature*, owned by fellow artist Francis Edmonds. The following year he submitted three of his outdoor studies from nature for exhibition at the American Art-Union, including a work titled *Study near Marbletown*.⁶ Clearly the artist enjoyed painting in the area, because a second work titled *View near Marbletown* was also shown at the AA-U in 1845. Both of those works found buyers.⁷ The work under discussion was also painted on this trip, but it remained in the artist's hands until his death. In this finished sketch Durand concentrated on the single great tree anchoring the composition. In a photograph of Durand's studio taken about 1878, this painting appears, unframed, propped against a wall with other paintings stacked next to and against it (see fig. 56). Included in Durand's estate sale of 1887, *Study at Marbletown, Ulster County, N.Y.* was purchased for \$215 by the New-York Historical Society.⁸

This finished sketch contains two distinct styles of brushwork in the foliage of the trees, perhaps the product of two campaigns during 1845, beginning in the field and culminating in the studio, where Durand applied his finishing touches. Close regard is given to the textures of the tree bark and the outer leaves. The pressure of Durand's brush in the relatively thin paint created scumbling in the leaves, not surprising for plein-air execution, where rapid drying is a concern. Flyspecks in the paint confirm direct contact with the outdoors. The loosely painted foliage stands in contrast to a tighter, heavier application of paint in the central area of the canvas, as though the artist changed his mind about the effect he sought. Alterations in the paint may represent Durand's attempt to correct damage that occurred while the work remained in his studio.

6. The others were *Study in Jacob's Valley, near Kingston*, and *Study from Nature*. See Lawall, *Asher Brown Durand*, 336–37.

7. *Study near Marbletown* (no. 78) was bought by George N. Eaton, of Baltimore; *View near Marbletown* (no. 69), by E. D. Morgan, of New York.

8. Estate sale no. 319, 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (all dimensions are reversed in the estate catalogue); Richard J. Koke, comp., *American Landscape and Genre Paintings in the New-York Historical Society*, 3 vols. (Boston: New-York Historical Society, 1982), 322, no. 628.



Asher B. Durand

CAT. 10

Nature Study, Trees, Newburgh, N.Y., 1849

Oil on canvas, $22\frac{1}{8} \times 18$ in.

Inscribed and dated lower right: *Newburgh / 1849*

The New-York Historical Society, New York;

Gift of Nora Durand Woodman, 1932.49



FIG. 63 Asher B. Durand, *Study of Trees, Catskill Mountains*, ca. 1849. Graphite on paper, $13\frac{1}{16} \times 9\frac{1}{16}$ in. © Collection of The New-York Historical Society, Gift of Nora Durand Woodman, 1918.67

Durand made numerous detailed studies of individual specimen trees in both pencil and oils during his summer forays. In 1849 he spent a productive summer around Newburgh and Catskill, writing, "The weather is so fine that I am unwilling to quit without one more study which if obtained will make six, as the fifth will be finished tomorrow."⁹ *Nature Study, Trees, Newburgh, N.Y.* presents a pair of conifers, the graceful sway of their trunks culminating in sharply tapered points. In this oil sketch Durand has focused on the trunk and foliage of the trees and is less concerned with how and where they meet the ground. The blank background indicates this was a field sketch the artist did not intend for public display. Clearly plein-air, this study projects the acuteness of vision typical of Durand's early mature work. Inflected with Ruskinian emphasis on details and crispness, it was clearly intended for reference and, as such, is truly a study in Durand's use of the term.

Drawings from the same summer made in Newburgh and Catskill display a similar sense of structure and greater integration with the landscape. In *Study of Trees, Catskill Mountains* (fig. 63), Durand has emphasized the propensity for pines to take hold between the rocks on a steep slope, their trunks growing upward at a nearly ninety-degree angle to the ground. One of the most important lessons the artist gleaned from Cole was the need to learn the distinguishing characteristics of nature's forms. In the case of trees, that knowledge would enable the artist to paint with confidence in the studio, knowing that from one accurate exemplar he could invent entire forests.

9. Durand to John Durand, Tannersville, N.Y., 28 September 1849. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 3, folder 9, NYPL.





Asher B. Durand

CAT. 11

Hudson River Sketch, ca. 1850–57

Oil on canvas, 18 × 24 in.

Mrs. John W. Pearson

The year 1850 marked another especially successful outdoor campaign for Durand, this one including a trip to Catskill Clove with Christopher Pearse Cranch. That summer Durand embarked on a series of sketches in oil paying particular attention to foregrounds and rocks. To his son, Durand wrote, “I have completed 5 studies & am working now on the 6th so my time has been pretty well spent, & if I shall be able to get one more & perhaps a drawing or two I shall be content.”¹⁰

In a recently discovered unfinished study from nature (cat. 11) Durand used pencil to loosely indicate the contours of the distant Catskill Mountains and the foreground hill on which he stood. The mountain and sky have a fresh quality and the brushwork is thin and fluid, in contrast to the much more detailed rendering of the foreground foliage. At some point in this process Durand must have recognized that foreground and distance would not easily resolve into a unified composition, making further work on the middle distance superfluous.

10. Durand to John Durand, Tannersville, N.Y., 9 October 1850. Asher B. Durand Papers, box 4, folder 8, NYPL.

Durand's habit of creating landscapes from "bits" of scenery contributed to a constant problem in his larger canvases, especially horizontal ones—that of disparities in scale from foreground foliage and undergrowth to the elements found in the middle and far distances. In *June Shower* of 1854 (fig. 64), the foliage in the immediate foreground is elephantine in scale when compared with the diminutive figures of man and oxen making their way through the middle distance. The collector and dealer Samuel P. Avery certainly noticed the inconsistencies of scale inherent in Durand's studies from nature, and the corresponding anomaly in the artist's larger studio paintings. In a letter to Jasper Francis Cropsey he wrote,

The artists are beginning to return Mr Durand having been back some time He was most of the time at Compton White Mts he has made some unusually large studies or pictures by bringing together several parts from nature—a fore-ground from one place—middle do. [ditto] from some other spot distance do. [ditto]—sky from no where, and then filling up the *chinks* with Durand (forgive my irreverance [*sic*]) [.]¹¹

Whether he abandoned his unfinished sketch from despair, bad weather, or a roving itinerary, Durand decided not to complete or paint over it. Rather than destroying the work, he stretched another canvas on top of it, subsequently completing a compelling vertical study of rocks and foliage, titled *Guard House, Catskill Mountains* (cat. 12). Here the artist presents a convincing projection into depth from the gnarled tree roots in the

11. Samuel P. Avery to Jasper F. Cropsey, Sunday, 25 October 1856. Correspondence files, Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.



FIG. 64 Asher B. Durand, *June Shower*, 1854.
Oil on canvas, 33 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 48 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Manoogian Collection



Asher B. Durand

CAT. 12

Guard House, Catskill Mountains, ca. 1850–57

Oil on canvas, 24 × 18 in.

Signed lower right: ABD

Mrs. John W. Pearson

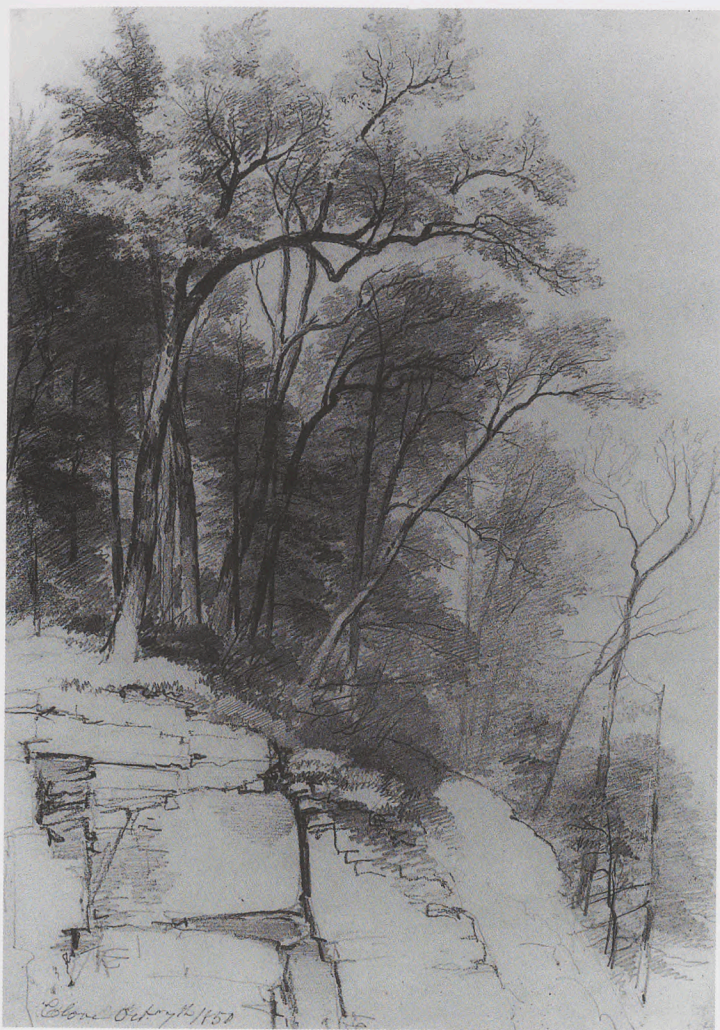


FIG. 65 Asher B. Durand, *Study of Trees and Rocks, Catskill Clove*, 7 October 1850. Graphite on paper, $13\frac{7}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{16}$ in. Inscribed *Clove Oct. 7th 1850*. © Collection of The New-York Historical Society, 1918.62

immediate foreground to the weathered outcropping anchoring the middle distance. The cool, dark forest interior throws the rock's surface into relief. Here, as in many of Durand's finished plein-air studies, the artist used the butt of his brush to scribble into the wet paint, adding highlights and providing detail without further use of paint. The cohesive sense of space—effected by the steep view up to the treetops—marks this as one of the artist's most accomplished studies.

Pencil sketches from Durand's 1850 excursions around Catskill suggest this oil sketch may have been painted the same year. *Study of Trees and Rocks, Catskill Clove* (fig. 65) adopts a similarly steep view up a short bluff, with trees planted firmly in its meager topsoil. Dated 7 October 1850, it marks a change in Durand's focus from level views toward a visible distance to more vertiginous and deeply foreshortened space. He would adapt elements from these finished sketches in his large-scale easel paintings but never relinquish the traditional footing of level ground or an elevated perspective.

Asher B. Durand

CAT. 13

Study from Nature, Peekskill, N.Y., 1854

Oil on canvas, 16¾ × 24 in.

Inscribed and dated lower right: *Peekskill 1854*

Inscribed verso: *Study from Nature / by A. B. Durand*

The New-York Historical Society, New York; Gift of Nora

Durand Woodman, 1932.33

Occasionally Durand painted a study that was neither finished nor entirely resolved. In *Study from Nature, Peekskill, N.Y.* Durand tackled a subject unusual for him, the rocky shoreline of a lake. The openness of the landscape and the strong diagonal of the slope presented significant challenges to an artist more familiar with woodland interiors and closely observed specimens of rocks and trees. Traditional framing devices are absent. Instead, Durand concentrated on the soil and scrub foliage, adhering to his own advice from his "Letters on Landscape Painting" published in the *Crayon*, to study minutely the elements of the foreground. Ruskin's appreciation for the Pre-Raphaelite love of detail and fidelity to nature appealed to Durand.

Study from Nature, Peekskill, N.Y. clearly demonstrates the gulf between Durand's studies from nature, which he exhibited, and the plein-air sketches he used in the studio for reference. In this sketch Durand fell victim to one of his own caveats, that of being overwhelmed by nature's variety in the attempt to encompass too much on a single canvas. The artist held onto this sketch, displaying it as part of an unframed sequence of horizontal landscape sketches in his studio in Maplewood, New Jersey. Included in the artist's estate sale, the picture remained unsold, probably because of its unfinished and unresolved nature.¹²

12. This work has been identified as the likely candidate for no. 306, *Near Peekskill, N.Y., Early Autumn*, 23½ × 16½ in., sight (dimensions reversed). See Lawall, *Documentary Catalogue*, 173–74, no. 341; and Koke, *American Landscape and Genre Paintings*, 333, no. 673.



Asher B. Durand

CAT. 14

Study from Nature, Bronxville, N.Y., 1856

Oil on canvas, 16¾ × 24 in.

Inscribed and dated verso: *Study from / Nature, /*
by A. B. Durand / Bronxville May 24th 1856

The New-York Historical Society, New York;

Gift of Nora Durand Woodman, 1932.³⁴

This scene of the forest floor is one of the few oil sketches Durand inscribed with a specific day of the year. In *Study from Nature, Bronxville, N.Y.*, the artist decided to concentrate on painting the rocks, turf, and lichens at the base of a small stand of trees, intentionally limiting his field of vision. The muted palette, like that of *Study from Nature, Peekskill, N.Y.* (cat. 13) painted two years earlier, is typical of the artist's unfinished plein-air sketches. Durand has gone to great lengths to transcribe the varied textures of the forest interior: lichens, moss, and ferns on the floor and covering the rocks and lower tree trunks convey the moistness of the environment as well as implying its silence; the trees are but a suggestion of form, their outlines drawn in gray paint with minimal articulation.

This sketch is a particularly good example of plein-air work that is finished only to the point that is useful to the artist. Durand did not strive for allover finish in this oil sketch but was interested in capturing information by deliberately limiting his focus to the moss-covered rocks and tree roots that form a carpet blending into the lush green background. This exercise in painting the textures of the forest flora enabled him to describe the mossy overgrowth without losing the structural integrity of the rocks and roots beneath. In *Study from Nature, Bronxville, N.Y.*, Durand chose to paint a segment of the forest in which he could discern variations on dampness, opting to focus on his sensory response to the landscape.



Asher B. Durand

CAT. 15

Study from Nature, Rocks and Trees, ca. 1856

Oil on canvas, 17 × 21½ in.

The New-York Historical Society, New York;

Gift of Mrs. Lucy Maria Durand Woodman,

1907.26



Study from Nature, Rocks and Trees is one of the more highly detailed and finished works typical of the studies from nature that Durand placed on public exhibition. Although it retains much of the freshness of handling associated with his plein-air sketches, this work also contains more thoughtful consideration as the artist brought each form to visual completion. The broad use of wet-on-wet paint indicates that the artist worked on this painting while the surface was still damp. Durand turned his brush around and used the butt end to score the wet paint, creating the highlights along the birch saplings and the weathered texture of the boulder in the lower right center. He also made a few adjustments after the paint had dried, possibly after returning to his studio, notably adding yellow highlights that help unite the picture visually.

Rather than relying entirely on a loaded brush to paint his forms, Durand used a variety of painterly shorthand techniques to indicate different textures. He created the lichens on the rock on the far right side by pouncing the surface with a dry, stiff-bristled brush dipped in black paint. To set up the dynamic of the composition before adding foliage and rocks, Durand used a strong line to create the major design elements of arching branches and trunks of trees. To create focal points, the artist lavished effort on the leaves on the left side of the canvas, employing a cursory shorthand in the foliage on the right, stippling the wet paint to suggest both mass and individual leaves.

Durand painted several closely related studies of weathered boulders during the 1850s, including *Rocky Cliff* (Reynolda House, Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, N.C.), which emphasizes the lichens and other plant life growing out of niches in the rocks. The broken boulders tip toward each other, providing the artist with a visual focal point and breaking the resolute horizontality of the limestone strata. The exuberantly handled trees along the high horizon seem animated, an anthropomorphic counterpoint to the obdurate stone.

Daniel Huntington

CAT. 16

Portrait of Asher Brown Durand, 1857

Oil on canvas, 56 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 44 in.

The Century Association, New York



FIG. 66 Asher B. Durand, *White Mountain Scenery*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 48 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 72 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. © Collection of The New-York Historical Society, The Robert L. Stuart Collection, on permanent loan from the New York Public Library, Stuart, S105

In 1855 Daniel Huntington accompanied Asher Durand to Franconia Notch, a trip that may have influenced Huntington's decision to portray the eminent landscapist at the site. Certainly Durand was at work on a monumental rendition of the scenery (fig. 66) that year, a fact that may also have played a role in the choice of Franconia Notch as a backdrop for this portrait. Painted in 1857 and presented to the Century Association in 1864, Huntington's portrait shows Durand at work, palette in hand and an unfinished painting of Franconia Notch on his easel. The portrait is the epitome of the plein-air landscape painter at work and accurately captures the way Durand went about painting his studies from nature. Durand published his "Letters on Landscape Painting" in 1855 in the *Crayon*; they outlined his philosophy regarding plein-air painting and contributed to his reputation. By 1857, the date of this portrait, Durand was considered the leading practitioner of plein-air painting, and he placed many of his small finished studies in the annual exhibitions at the National Academy of Design.

David Lawall noted that the study that appears on the easel was painted by Durand himself. Durand's contribution to Huntington's portrait lends it an air of authenticity, as though the viewer were actually watching Durand at work.¹³ In a delightful bit of irony, the work on that painted easel is a reduced copy of Durand's much larger painting of Franconia Notch rather than the depiction of an earlier, plein-air effort.¹⁴

13. Lawall, *Asher Brown Durand*, 4:558.

14. Lawall, *Asher Brown Durand*, 3:169–70, 255, Appendix II. There is a smaller study of the topography for *White Mountain Scenery*, painted ca. 1857; however, it measures 20 × 30 in. and is also a horizontal composition. This study is also in the collection of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, Robert L. Stuart Collection no. 211, on extended loan to the New-York Historical Society. See Koke, *American Landscape and Genre Paintings*, 346, no. 717; Lawall, *Documentary Catalogue*, 187, no. 402.





John Frederick Kensett

CAT. 17

At Pasture, ca. 1844–45

Oil on canvas, 10 × 20 in.

Alexander Gallery, New York

On 1 June 1840 Kensett sailed for England, determined to put his career as an engraver behind him and devote his life to painting. He traveled in good company, accompanied on his voyage by fellow engraver-turned-landscape-painter Asher B. Durand and fellow artists John Casilear and Thomas P. Rossiter. For the next seven years Kensett remained in England and Europe, receiving encouragement from his American colleagues, among them Thomas Cole, whom he met in Paris in 1841.¹

Between 1843 and 1845 Kensett was in England to settle his grandmother's estate. During this two-year period he devoted himself to sketching and painting. Kensett was determined to get the most out of his sketching opportunities, as if through sheer willpower he could accomplish his desire to become an artist. From England he wrote,

tho' I have had most impropitious weather for sketching yet I have managed with the use of my umbrella & a determination to battle with the elements—to [illeg.] thus for two or three of what I consider my best sketches in oil. I hope to add to that number daily—the scene of my labors has been in the ground of Capt. Harcourts—called St Leonards Hill . . . and the studies I am making will be invaluable to me as references, independent of the use I may make of them as subjects for larger pictures.²

1. John K. Howat, in John Paul Driscoll and Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master* (New York: Worcester Museum, in association with W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 26.

2. Kensett to John R. Kensett, the artist's uncle, 8 August 1844. Edwin Morgan Collection, John Frederick Kensett Papers, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Services Division, Albany.



FIG. 67 John Constable,
Wivenhoe Park, Essex, 1816.
Oil on canvas, 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 39 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, Widener Col-
lection, 1942.9.10.(PA)

Kensett made hundreds of outdoor pencil sketches in his tours across England and France, reinforcing his keen eye for nature's forms.³ His plein-air oil sketches appear to have been inspired by John Constable's oil sketches, which he saw in C. R. Leslie's collection, as well as works by the English master in the Sheepshanks collection, which he visited with Durand.⁴ Although undated, *At Pasture* is clearly indebted to Constable's fresh vision of English scenery, particularly his earlier works (fig. 67). The small pools of standing water, the result of the brief shower passing overhead, document the "impropitious weather" Kensett endured while working out-of-doors. The painterly vitality of the wet trees, their leaves seeming to rustle in the breeze, is borrowed from Constable's work, as is the overgrown fence post in the center foreground along the edges of the watercourse. The sparkle of impasted pigment conveys the exhilaration Kensett experienced as he learned to paint the landscape. The two years spent in England gave Kensett the opportunity to establish his technique in a country with a long-standing tradition of landscape painting, an environment happily supportive of his aims.

3. Driscoll, in Driscoll and Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master*, 55.

4. *Ibid.*, 52.

John Frederick Kensett

CAT. 18

Standing Artist, ca. 1845–47

Pencil and watercolor on gray paper, 11 $\frac{5}{16}$ × 8 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Kensett arrived in Italy in November 1845 and during the following two summers made walking tours of the countryside in the company of fellow American landscape painters Thomas Hicks and Benjamin Champney. During the winter season it was common for the expatriates to attend classes at local academies for instruction in figure drawing, and Kensett joined Christopher Pearse Cranch at “a night-school where students drew and painted in watercolor from costumed models.”⁵ Judging from the number of costume studies of Italian men and women bearing Kensett’s signature, he was a diligent student, amassing reference figures that made appearances in his Italianate paintings.⁶

Among the watercolors of posed figures, one stands out—that of a young man dressed for a plein-air painting trip. The artist wears sturdy shoes, leggings, and a hat and carries a knapsack, sketch umbrella, and staff that doubles as a mahlstick. His sketching pad in hand and hip flask at his belt, this artist is ready to set forth into the countryside. The head and hat are left unfinished, leaving vague his identity, if in fact the sketch is meant to portray anyone in particular.⁷ It is also not entirely clear whether Kensett painted this work in Italy or en route to Italy during the summer of 1845. Making his way over the Alps through Germany and Switzerland, Kensett might well have modeled his artist on a Teutonic example.⁸ However, given his limited production of work in watercolor, it seems more sensible to assume this sketch was made along with his costume studies in Italy.

5. Leonora Cranch Scott, *The Life and Letters of Christopher Pearse Cranch* (Boston and New York, 1917), 105.

6. John Driscoll, *John F. Kensett Drawings* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Museum of Art, 1978), 37–45.

7. Driscoll has suggested the figure might be that of one of Kensett’s American colleagues or the artist himself. *Ibid.*, 45.

8. The Düsseldorf Academy also stressed figure drawing, and during the years Bierstadt spent in Germany he too sketched local peasants or models in pencil and in oil.





John Frederick Kensett

CAT. 19

Niagara Falls and the Rapids, ca. 1851–52

Oil on canvas, 16 × 24 in.

Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Martha C. Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865, 48.439

Kensett first visited Niagara Falls during 1851–52, making numerous sketches in pencil and in oils of the cataract and the Niagara River. The suggestion of deafening noise associated with the cataract was an impressive sensory experience unusual in Kensett's normally quiet oeuvre. In keeping with his interest in the dynamics of moving water, Kensett's oil sketches explore the river itself, both above and below the falls. *Niagara Falls and the Rapids* focuses on the widening of the river as it makes its final turn toward the falls, the rapids indicated by the delicate, frothy whitecaps scattered across the water's surface. Although Kensett has included Terrapin Tower (perched on Goat Island, visible here at the extreme left of the river above the falls) and several shoreline buildings, he emphasizes the force of the water as it moves from the glassy calm perceived in the distance to the energetic rapids at the bend in the river.

Kensett painted a number of oil sketches that focused on the river itself rather than the falls.⁹ All are characterized by loosely painted foregrounds, suggestive of foliage and

9. For larger consideration of Kensett's paintings of Niagara, along with those of his colleagues, see Elizabeth McKinsey, *Niagara Falls, Icon of the American Sublime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), esp. 236–40; and Jeremy Adamson, *Niagara: Two Centuries of Changing Attitudes, 1697–1901* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985).



FIG. 68 John Frederick Kensett, *Suspension Bridge, Niagara Falls*, 1851–52. Oil on canvas, $9\frac{3}{4} \times 17\frac{1}{2}$ in. Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York



FIG. 69 John Frederick Kensett, *Whirlpool, Niagara*, 1851–52. Oil on canvas, $13\frac{1}{2} \times 22$ in. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Maxim Karolik, 64.436

topography; a middle distance in which the river becomes the focal point; and a distant view to a flat horizon. The farthest view upstream is *Suspension Bridge, Niagara Falls* (fig. 68), that new engineering feat just visible as the river makes its final turn toward the falls. From his vantage point above the falls Kensett moved to a spot below the cataract. *Whirlpool, Niagara* (fig. 69) presents a vista painted from higher ground, looking down between the high bluffs into the river canyon where the two forks of the river meet. The falls themselves are upstream, to the right of the picture's edge. Kensett has captured the merging of the waters and the resultant whirlpool, returning to the stippled white froth found in *Niagara Falls and the Rapids* to convey the motion of the waters.

Niagara Falls and the Rapids appears, unframed, in a frequently published photograph of Kensett's studio of about 1864 (see fig. 32), to the left of the open door. After two trips to Niagara (the second was in 1857), Kensett had amassed at least forty-two works in oil of the subject; yet he painted only one known large-scale finished painting of the falls (Collection of the White House, Washington, D.C.).¹⁰ All of Kensett's known oil sketches of Niagara were included in his massive estate sale, which was photographed in its entirety (see fig. 53).¹¹

10. See Jeremy Adamson, "Frederic Church's Niagara: The Sublime as Transcendence," 4 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1981), 1:221.

11. Association Hall, *The Collection of Paintings of the Late Mr. John F. Kensett*, catalogue of the executors' sale, 24–29 March 1872 (New York: Nemec Press Co., 1872; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1977).



John Frederick Kensett

CAT. 20

The Hemlock, ca. 1870

Oil on canvas, 19 × 14 in.

Signed lower center: JFK

The Century Association, New York,

Bequest of Edward Slosson, 1871

Kensett's *Hemlock* appears to be one of the artist's late studies of trees. Although it is undated, its strongest affinities are to a series of pencil drawings and oil sketches of trees painted between 1870 and 1872. In a drawing inscribed *Chicago Lake July 30th—70* (fig. 70), the upright main trunk of the tree bears a striking resemblance to the single tree in *The Hemlock*. The trunk tapers as it reaches to the sky, and the lower branches are foliated, whereas the uppermost branches are barren. Kensett had a greater tendency to include a single tree leaning into the open sky during 1870–72. *Study of Beeches* (fig. 71), painted in a manner similar to the oil sketch under discussion, was part of the "Last Summer's Work" (see chap. 5, 102–3). In both paintings Kensett applied the paint with short, hatched brushstrokes, which lend the tree trunk and foliage a rough, painterly surface far different in treatment from the smoother contours of his earlier works.



FIG. 70 John Frederick Kensett, *Chicago Lake*, 30 July 1870. Graphite on gray paper, 10 × 13¾ in. Babcock Galleries



FIG. 71 John Frederick Kensett, *Study of Beeches*, ca. 1872. Oil on canvas, 14¾ × 10¾ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Thomas Kensett, 1874. (74.13)

John Frederick Kensett

CAT. 21

Franconia Notch, New Hampshire, 1871

Oil on cardboard, 12¼ × 9¾ in.

Signed and dated lower left: *J.F.K. 71*

Mr. and Mrs. James Berry Hill



The loose, painterly brushwork in this oil sketch marks it as a plein-air painting from late in Kensett's career, the forms of rock and trees highly abbreviated in a lightly impasted shorthand. Kensett has suggested the tangled density of the trees overhanging the rocky streambed, his wet-on-wet strokes blending in a subtle play of muted color. The delicate touches of pure white in the center distance are the only visual clue to the depth implied in the painting's abstract perspective. Unlike his early work, praised for its faithful delineation of rock type and texture, Kensett's late oil sketches defy those conventions, tending toward the suggestion and effects championed by George Inness and John F. Weir.

Franconia Notch is not an atypically loose or painterly sketch. *Glenellis Falls, New Hampshire* (fig. 72) bears a strong resemblance to it, in that Kensett employs a nearly identical palette and approach to rendering trees, foliage, and running water. Kensett's familiarity with the region, developed over more than two decades of summers spent exploring the hills and valleys of New England, allows him to paint with a lively, painterly shorthand. It is this type of field sketch that Kensett kept to himself, working up more finished studies for exhibition and sale.¹² It is difficult to determine whether Kensett ever employed plein-air sketches such as *Franconia Notch* in his later works or simply allowed them to form a private part of his oeuvre. Described as sketches so loosely painted that they were but "hints that he probably understood, and possibly other artists, and nothing more,"¹³ these late works reveal the personal aspect of the artist's career.

12. *Glenellis Falls, New Hampshire* remained in Kensett's estate, one of many "unfinished" sketches displayed and sold after the artist's death (no. 643 in Association Hall, *Collection of Paintings of . . . Kensett*).

13. "Art. The Kensett Sale," *Aldine*, 6 May 1873, 107.

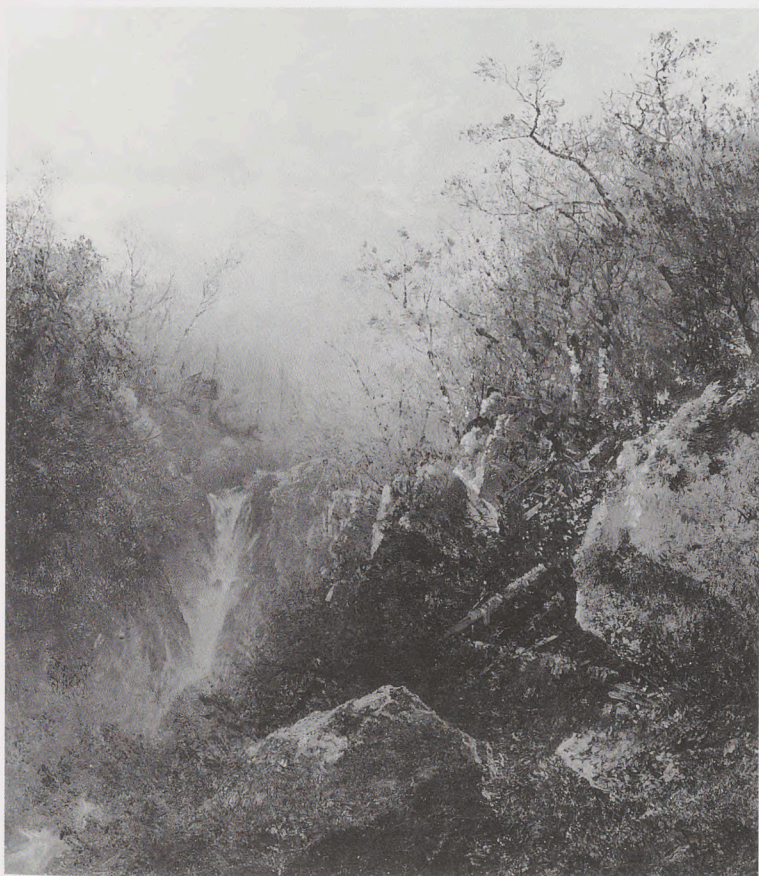


FIG. 72 John Frederick Kensett, *Glenellis Falls, New Hampshire*, ca. 1871. Oil on canvas, 19 × 16½ in. Private collection



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 22

Rough Surf, Mount Desert Island, Maine, 1850

Oil on paper mounted on panel, 12½ × 16¼ in.

Collection of Thomas Lee and Ann Tenenbaum;

Courtesy Thea Westreich Art Advisory Services

In 1850 Church made a sketching trip to Mount Desert Island off the coast of Maine, where he made several impressive plein-air oil sketches.¹ Church finished three of these to a greater degree than the rest: *Rough Surf, Mount Desert Island, Maine*; *Mount Desert Island, Maine* (see fig. 30); and *Abandoned Skiff* (see fig. 29). In the case of *Rough Surf*, Church began the sketch on paper out-of-doors, subsequently mounting it on board and adding finishing touches to the whitecaps. The unmistakable feeling of plein-air execution is conveyed by the informality of the composition; the scene was viewed at an angle from which the artist could study the patterns on the moving water as it crashed against the rocks and receded, frothing, out to sea. Broad, sure strokes define the rocky shoreline, a solid foil to the fluid, nuanced strokes that make up the foaming water. Church's brush dances over the expanse of water, creating a rhythmic sweep punctuated by stippled whitecaps and foam. The intensity with which Church studied the water's motion enabled him to use a painterly shorthand to convey a similar effect in *Mount Desert Island, Maine*. Here Church paints the receding waves as a more solid mass of water, abstracting the detail found in *Rough Surf* to shift the focus to the broader concerns of setting and weather. The artist's careful articulation of the details of the water in both works presaged his fascination with the cataract at Niagara and indicated the beginning of a lifelong interest in activity at the water's edge.²

1. Among them are *Coast at Mount Desert* (Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-645), reproduced in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *Close Observation: Selected Oil Sketches by Frederic E. Church* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 56.

2. John Wilmerding has written extensively on American artists working along the Maine coastline, notably Cole and Church. His most recent contribution is *The Artist's Mount Desert: American Painters on the Maine Coast* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 23

Autumn in North America, ca. 1856

Oil on board, 11¼ × 17 in.

Signed lower right: F. CHURCH.

Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College,
Poughkeepsie, NY, gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.16

In 1856 the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon purchased three oil sketches from Church that represented the entire spectrum of scenery Church had painted to that point in his career. All three were finished sketches for a major easel painting, and all three appear to have been painted prior to the completion of the affiliated canvas rather than after the fact. *Autumn in North America* was painted as a preliminary study for the large canvas similarly titled (fig. 73) commissioned by Church's parents and completed later that year.

The variations between the oil sketch and the finished painting illuminate the differences dictated by scale, specifically the adjustments in the number and density of figural elements and the arrangement of the trees. The sketch shimmers with a restless energy



FIG. 73 Frederic Edwin Church, *Autumn*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 54 × 75⅞ in. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1981.32.A

born of a vibrant palette, the individual forms rapidly brushed with an eye for composition and color rather than detailed form. When Church enlarged the scene from sketch to canvas he removed the foreground bridge, placing the cows in the water in the middle distance. Church's adjustments opened the foreground and created a more traditional entry into the picture, framed by a much larger foreground tree, unblocked by the bridge in the sketch. Such alterations between Church's preliminary studies and larger easel paintings are common, confirmation that the artist relied on them to set his structural features and then allowed the scale of the canvas to determine how each feature was actually incorporated for best effect.

Although it is not possible to prove that Magoon visited Church in his studio, if he did he might well have seen the large easel painting in progress.³ The oil sketch *Autumn in North America* must have appealed to Magoon for its reference to the season, as well as the limpid atmosphere and dancing highlights of brilliantly colored paint. Magoon acquired the study for *Autumn* by the end of February 1856, as it was featured at a soirée he hosted that month as "an autumnal scene radiant with Church's glowing tints."⁴ Church's large painting was completed by June of the same year, but the artist must have been finished with his preliminary study by the time Magoon purchased it.

3. Sally Mills, in Ella Foshay and Sally Mills, *All Seasons and Every Light: Nineteenth-Century American Landscapes from the Collection of Elias Lyman Magoon* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1983), 40.

4. *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 4 March 1856, 2; quoted in Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1:227 n. 10.

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 24

Niagara Falls and Terrapin Tower, March 1856

Oil and graphite on canvas,
7 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 11 $\frac{13}{16}$ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National
Design Museum, Smith-
sonian Institution, New
York, Gift of Louis P.
Church, 1917-4-765C



A small group of sketches from Church's first trip to Niagara Falls in March 1856 provides an early instance of the artist's developing a finished oil sketch based on a plein-air oil sketch. Arriving in early spring, Church found the area blanketed with snow. In addition to the pencil and gouache sketches he inscribed on the spot, he painted at least two oil sketches in the open air. One of them, *Niagara Falls and Terrapin Tower* (cat. 24), is painted on salmon-tinted canvas, which lends a touch of warmth to an obviously chilly scene.⁵ Church used a restricted palette of greens and whites for the water, ice, and snow, with subtle touches of pink and yellow in the weak light of the winter sky. Painted on canvas, this small sketch appears to have been tacked down to the inside lid of his sketch box. Church worked rapidly to paint the waterfall, the Terrapin Tower on Goat Island anchoring the right foreground. He divided his attention between the water rushing toward the falls and the spray rising from the cascade as it blends with the clouds. The explosion of brushwork and the soft blending of colors at the edges of each form confirm that Church executed the little painting in one sitting, and likely at speed, in deference to the chilly air. His fingerprints are readily visible along the margins of the sketch, alluding to the haste with which he worked, not even waiting for the sketch to dry before removing it from its support.

What sets this small sketch apart in Church's oeuvre is its role as the basis of a later oil sketch, executed in the studio. In a second sketch now titled *Niagara Falls from*

5. The other plein-air oil sketch is dated 20 March 1856 (Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-765B).



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 25

Niagara Falls from Goat Island, Winter, March 1856

Oil and graphite on composition board, 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 17 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.

Inscribed bottom center:

F. CHURCH 56 / MARCH

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P.

Church, 1917-4-765A

Goat Island, Winter (cat. 25), one of Church's more highly finished oil sketches, the artist has recomposed the scene, placing Terrapin Tower in the middle and adopting a more distant vantage point. These adjustments shift the emphasis away from the water tumbling over the snow-clad falls, now farther in the left distance. Instead Church has made the focus of this sketch the light caught in the vapor rising from the cascade and tinging the clouds developing to the right of the cataract. For this larger sketch Church chose a pressed chipboard (composition) panel for his support instead of paper; the absence of tack holes, the adjustment of passages of paint after the primary surface had dried, and the addition of a signature and final layer of varnish all point to studio facture; however, Church's brushwork is as exuberant and fluid here as on the initial sketch in oil on paper.

Church's small plein-air oil sketch and subsequent studio sketch reveal a more complicated attitude toward the technique than is usually accorded these efforts. At Mount Desert in 1850 Church had painted small finished sketches based on a suite of plein-air sketches (see cat. 22), but there is no direct correspondence between any of the oil sketches themselves. Given his successes in displaying small paintings at the Academy and Art-Union exhibitions, Church may have intended this finished oil sketch as an exhibitable effort, too.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 26

Mount Katahdin, ca. 1856

Oil on canvas, $8\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{3}{4}$ in.

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts (gift of Winslow Ames [PA 1925] in memory of Edward Winslow Ames [PA 1892])

Beginning in 1851 Church made sure his travels and his accomplishments remained in the public eye. That year the artist wrote an article describing his own exploits at Mount Desert Island, Maine, published anonymously, thereby generating interest in his finished sketches from that trip (see chap. 3, 66–67). After the initial success of that article, Church enlisted other writers to chronicle his exploits, providing him with an effective source of publicity created outside the structure of mainstream art criticism. In September 1856 Church traveled through New Hampshire into Maine, to climb Mount Katahdin and canoe along the Penobscot River. He was accompanied by his friend the writer Theodore Winthrop, who described their trip in the opening essay of his book *Life in the Open Air*, published posthumously in 1863. Winthrop recounted the whimsical

and profound moments on the trip, using the alias "Iglesias" for Church's barely concealed identity. As they approached Mount Katahdin, Winthrop marshaled some of his most evocative language to describe the looming peak:

I saw Katahdin twenty miles away, a giant undwarfed by any rival. The remainder landscape was only minor and judiciously accessory. The hills were low before it, the lake lowly, and upright above lake and hill lifted the mountain pyramid. Isolate greatness tells. There were no underling mounts about this mountain-in-chief. And now on its shoulders and crest sunset shone, glowing. Warm violet followed the glow, soothing away the harshness of granite lines. Luminous violet dwelt upon the peak, while below the clinging forests were purple in sheltered gorges, where they could climb nearer the summit, loved of light, and lower down gloomed green and sombre in the shadow.⁶

Church sketched in pencil while traveling, finishing his painted sketches after returning to New York. He presented this oil sketch of Mount Katahdin, which resembles the description penned by Winthrop, to his friend, who died shortly thereafter, an early casualty of the Civil War. George W. Curtis, the editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, arranged to publish the volume of Winthrop's essays, which included Winthrop's broadside of Church's *Heart of the Andes* in addition to his piece on Katahdin. The latter was illustrated by a woodcut after Church's oil sketch (fig. 74). As a memorial to Winthrop, this volume, and its primary illustration, paid respects both to Winthrop's early demise and to his friendship with Church.

6. Theodore Winthrop, *Life in the Open Air, and Other Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), 76.



FIG. 74 Engraving after Frederic Edwin Church, *Mount Katahdin*. From Theodore Winthrop, *Life in the Open Air, and Other Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), frontispiece

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 27

Horseshoe Falls, December 1856–January 1857

Oil on two pieces of paper joined together,
mounted on aluminum panel, 11½ × 35⅝ in.

Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office
of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation,
OL.1981.15.A.B



Mr. Church, as one of the results of his summer studies, exhibits a sketch of Niagara Falls, which more fully renders the “might and majesty” of this difficult subject than we ever remember to have seen these characteristics of it on canvas. The point of view is happily chosen, and its impressiveness seems to be produced by admirable drawing aided by a skillful subordination of accessories; the eye is not diverted, led away, as it were, from the soul of the scene by diffuse representation of surrounding features. We shall look forward to the picture to be made from this sketch with much interest, as we believe Mr. Church intends to reproduce it on a more extended scale.⁷

In preparation for painting his massive *Niagara* (fig. 75), Church painted two highly finished oil sketches of the panorama, both extending across two sheets of paper. *Horseshoe Falls* comes closest to providing the final view Church adopted in his Great Picture and is the oil sketch referred to in the *Crayon*'s review quoted above. In it Church chose the view from the Canadian side of the river, looking south from above the falls. By making more than one detailed oil sketch, he was clearly testing to see whether a more or less expansive view served his purpose best. The reviewer for the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* mentioned, “Church has made some admirable studies of the Falls of Niagara, one of which, when elaborated on a large canvas, will prove one of the most effective views of that unequalled scene ever painted.”⁸ That reference to more than one sketch, followed by the *Crayon*'s notice, provides the clue Gerald Carr used to identify *Horseshoe Falls* as the final study for Church's Great Picture.⁹

Church used his last two studies in tandem to compose his Great Picture. In addition to *Horseshoe Falls* Church painted *Niagara Falls and Horseshoe Falls* (private collection).¹⁰ In this two-piece sketch he included both the American and the Canadian falls, adopting a more remote vantage point to widen his already panoramic gaze. In

7. *Crayon* (February 1857): 54.

8. *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 2 December 1856, 2; quoted in Carr, *Olana*, 1:231.

9. Gerald Carr makes this identification a central feature of his extensive discussion of *Horseshoe Falls* in *ibid.*, 1:230–33.

10. Jeremy Adamson has also discussed the ramifications of Church's choices in composing *Niagara*. See Adamson, “Frederic Church's Niagara: The Sublime as Transcendence,” 4 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1981), 328–30; and Adamson, *Niagara: Two Centuries of Changing Attitudes, 1697–1901* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 63–64.



FIG. 75 Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*, 1857. Oil on canvas, $42\frac{1}{2} \times 90\frac{1}{2}$ in. In the Collection of The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 76.15



pulling back from the very brink of the falls, Church increased the proportion of sky visible above the horizon and deepened the watery foreground. Church found both sketches helpful in composing his Great Picture. In the final synthesis, he managed to incorporate the deeper space of the penultimate sketch while still positioning the viewer close to the brink of the cataract. The sky asserts a more active role in the finished painting than in *Horseshoe Falls*, a modification that emphasizes the water's turbulence in the lower left corner. Both of the panoramic oil sketches for *Niagara* remained in Church's possession.¹¹ Although *Niagara Falls and Horseshoe Falls* descended through a branch of the family into private hands, *Horseshoe Falls* remained at Olana, where it graced the sitting room by the 1890s. On one sketch from this campaign Church penciled an inscription and the notation \$500 on the verso,¹² suggesting it and perhaps other works adorning Church's studio were available for purchase during the unveiling of his Great Picture or afterward.

11. Gerald Carr postulates that Church may have given the sketch titled *Niagara Falls and Horseshoe Falls* to his daughter Downie shortly before his death. See Carr, *Olana*, 1:231.

12. The sketch so marked is *Horseshoe Falls and Table Rock* (Olana State Historic Site, OL.1981.9).

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 28

Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador, June or July 1857

Oil and graphite on thin paperboard, $9\frac{1}{4} \times 17\frac{9}{16}$ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian

Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-1296A

13. Katherine Manthorne has provided extensive and thoughtful commentary on Church's South American travels in her books *Creation and Renewal: Views of Cotopaxi by Frederic Edwin Church* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, for the National Museum of American Art, 1985) and *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America, 1839-1879* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989). For the most detailed analysis of Church's itinerary and artistic activity regarding Chimborazo, see Kevin Avery, *Church's Great Picture: The Heart of the Andes* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).

14. For Mignot, see Katherine E. Manthorne, with John W. Coffey, *The Landscapes of Louis Rémy Mignot: A Southern Painter Abroad* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, for the North Carolina Museum of Art, 1996).

15. On a sheet of oil sketches of Chimborazo (Cooper-Hewitt, 1917-4-825) Church observed the ebb and flow of clouds wreathing the summit; understandably these atmospheric conditions were a singular source of fascination for the artist. Church borrowed the scudding clouds from Chimborazo in his oil sketch of Cayambe (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 47.1237) and in the easel painting of the same subject (The New-York Historical Society, Robert L. Stuart Collection, on permanent loan from the New York Public Library).

Church designed his second trip to South America around his desire to draw and paint three of Ecuador's active volcanoes, Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, and Sangay.¹³ Traveling with fellow artist Louis Rémy Mignot,¹⁴ Church kept a diary of his travels to supplement his sketches. Moving at a deliberate pace well suited to artistic endeavors, Church made good use of his time, capturing geological and meteorological effects in pencil and oil. As a rule he annotated most of his pencil sketches, often identifying the site as well as noting date and time of day. The majority of the oil sketches, however, are silent as to where or when they were executed.

Between 5 and 7 June 1857, Church sketched Chimborazo and the surrounding countryside. The group of pencil sketches, oil sketches, and detailed drawings forms an interrelated set of references that Church would use in his easel paintings of Chimborazo and Cayambe, in particular. In a remarkably detailed drawing, inscribed *Composition with Effects Observed—Chimborazo from Guaranda* and dated *June 5-7, 1857* (fig. 76), the numbers in the sweeping clouds and sky correspond to precise notes describing colors and light effects, located along the bottom margin. Church's complex drawing is the result of a progression from a much more schematic pencil sketch, to an after-the-fact oil sketch, to this complete drawing.

In a sketchbook Church hastily drew the schematic contours of Chimborazo and the surrounding hills, as low-lying clouds scudded by under a full moon (fig. 77). The swiftly changing nature of mountain sunsets, and the attendant mobile cloud cover, forced Church to work rapidly in any medium. Perhaps the same night, or shortly thereafter, Church painted an oil sketch that reproduced those striking effects, *Mount Chimborazo Seen through Rising Mists and Clouds* (fig. 78). Together these impressions catalyzed Church to create his more detailed drawing described above (fig. 76). The artist later incorporated aspects of this suite of works in his oil sketch and painting of Cayambe, freely mixing his sources of inspiration when he returned to his studio.¹⁵

Working from a lower vantage point, Church created a second suite of oil sketches and drawings that concentrated on the snow-clad summit. In the finished oil sketch *Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador*, the snowcapped summit looms over the volcanic knife-ridge of foreground hills, its composition bearing a strong relationship to Church's detailed pencil drawing (fig. 76). The small thatched cottage found in the lower left quadrant of the oil sketch also appears in the drawing; in the sketch, however, Church painted a long, low white building in the lower right corner as a visual anchor. A strolling figure (headed in the direction opposite from that taken by the figure in the drawing) occupies the immediate foreground of a landscape punctuated by cultivated fields rising to the volcanic highlands. The extent of the wet-on-wet surface suggests Church painted *Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador* fairly rapidly, perhaps completing most of it at a single



FIG. 76 Frederic Edwin Church, *Composition with Effects Observed—Chimborazo from Guaranda*, 5–7 June 1857. Graphite on light gray-green paper, $11\frac{1}{4} \times 18$ in. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1977.130

sitting; its clear debt to the compositional drawing confirms that this oil sketch is the climax of a long sequence of preliminary sketches and not a plein-air view. The exact order of execution of these oil sketches remains unclear, but the important point is Church's ability to describe and recall color in such a way as to make the date of execution a concern secondary to the result.

Given the rustic conditions Church encountered on his travels, it is not likely that many of his oil sketches from this trip were accomplished on site, out-of-doors. *Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador, Shown from Riobamba* (cat. 29) does bear all of the hallmarks of plein-air execution, notably bugs and dirt trapped in the paint, fingerprints from handling the wet sketch in the field, and distressed edges from rough treatment in



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 29

Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador, Shown from Riobamba, July 1857

Oil on thin board, $11\frac{1}{16} \times 17\frac{7}{8}$ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution,
New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-704

transit.¹⁶ Its condition serves as a reminder of the difficulties inherent in plein-air oil sketching, and the advantages Church enjoyed by being able to rely so effectively on pencil sketches, color notes, and his memory from the field. Whether working in a hotel, hacienda, or his own studio in New York, Church likely opted for a combination of on-site notations made with some haste and more detailed sketches in oil composed and executed at a more leisurely interval.

16. *South American Landscape* (Cooper-Hewitt, 1917-4-708), torn and frayed, may have been painted on Church's first trip. Its synthetic composition and carefully placed church and rainbow mark it as having been composed and painted over more than a single sitting.

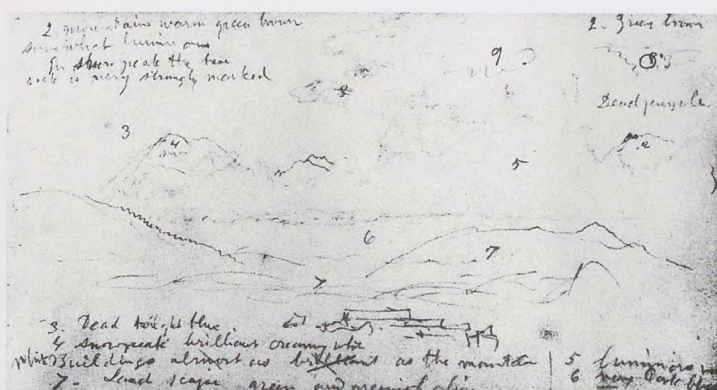


FIG. 77 Frederic Edwin Church, *View of Chimborazo*, 1857. Pencil on paper in a bound sketchbook, formerly in the collection of Mrs. Theodore Winthrop Church. From David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), fig. 27

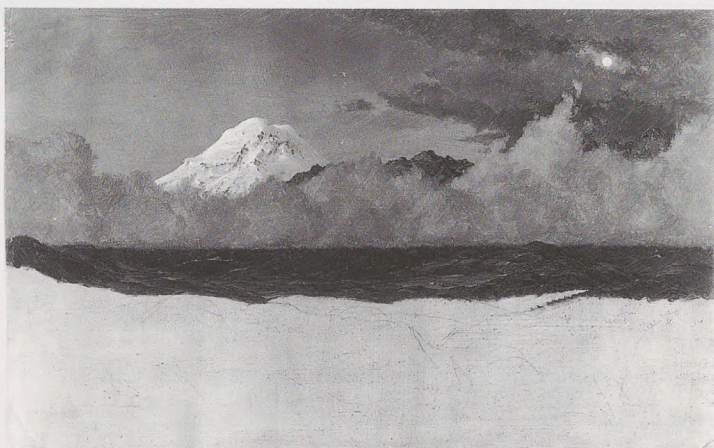


FIG. 78 Frederic Edwin Church, *Mount Chimborazo Seen through Rising Mists and Clouds*, May 1857. Oil and graphite on thin board, 13 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 21 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-824



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 30

Study for *Under Niagara*, September 1858

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 11¾ × 17½ in.

Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks,
Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1981.51.A.B

17. John Frederick Kensett, Jasper Francis Cropsey, Albert Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran also painted the base of the falls from the shore, working from a variety of points below the cataract. See Adamson, *Niagara*, and Elizabeth McKinsey, *Niagara Falls, Icon of the American Sublime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

18. Church to A. C. Goodwin, Clifton House, Niagara Falls, 24 September 1858. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, David C. Huntington Archives (Olana Archives). Two days earlier Church had chartered the boat for his sketching trip.

When Church returned to Niagara Falls in 1858, he decided to find a vantage point below the falls looking up at the cascade. On his earlier trips he had worked downriver along the shore, painting the falls as they split around Goat Island, framing the composition artfully with repoussoir foreground elements (fig. 79). This was a spot that proved popular with his fellow landscape painters.¹⁷ Rather than settling for the more mundane sites along the rocky shore, off to an oblique angle, Church determined to sketch the falls from the steamer *Maid of the Mist*. Church wrote that he had

induced the proprietor to try the experiment of keeping the steamer to the utmost limit in the great gulph of the Horse shoe falls—for as long time as I needed to make a sketch—The experiment had never been tried—but succeeded well—we remained tossing in the surging foam for forty minutes until I succeeded in making a rough sketch in oil—The consternation of the visitors on the Lower dc. may be imagined[.]¹⁸



FIG. 79 Frederic Edwin Church, *Horseshoe Falls, Niagara, from Canadian Bank*, 1856. Oil and graphite on paperboard, $11\frac{1}{16} \times 17\frac{1}{2}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-766A

Church's sketches from this venture certainly captured the attention of the press (see chap. 3, 75) and provided a context for the reception of his easel painting of the subject (now lost), completed over three years later. At some point during that interval Church framed and hung this oil sketch in his studio, later moving it to Olana.¹⁹ As a trophy of hazards overcome, this study for *Under Niagara* was a visible reminder of Church's daring and ambition. When Church executed the Great Picture, a four-by-six-foot canvas reputed to have been painted in a single day, the feat rivaled the making of the sketch for its appeal to the press and its potential to enthrall viewers. Calling the enormous canvas an "enlarged sketch," Church alluded to the central feature of the smaller work: that of calling to mind the sensory response to the actual site, thereby enabling the artist to work afresh from memory.

19. Gerald Carr notes the use of the plural *studies* in the Albany newspaper review in support of his belief that Church made more than this one oil sketch during his voyage. Carr has identified a pair of drawings and an oil sketch in the Cooper-Hewitt that might well have been made on this trip, and on this boat. Carr, *Olana*, 1:250.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 31

Twilight, a Sketch, 1858

Oil on canvas, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{4}$ in.

Signed and dated lower middle: *F E CHURCH—58*

Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks,
Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1981.8.A.B



FIG. 80 Frederic Edwin Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 40 × 64 in. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, 1965.233

Although the reviewers of *Twilight, a Sketch* could not decide if it was a study or a finished painting, the artist certainly considered it to be both. On display at the National Academy of Design during the spring of 1859, it was Church's only submission that year; he had installed *The Heart of the Andes* in his Tenth Street studio (see chap. 3, 67–68; chap. 5, 99–100). After the annual exhibition closed, the sketch returned to Church's studio, where it served as the preliminary study for the artist's next major painting, *Twilight in the Wilderness* (fig. 80). Church's decision to use this sketch to promote a work in progress at such an august venue as the NAD signaled two things: first, that Church did not mind annoying Asher B. Durand, president of the NAD, by reserving his Great Pictures for solo debuts; and second, that he viewed certain of his oil sketches proper company for the more finished paintings with which it hung.

Church's attitude might have developed from the simple recognition that the NAD benefited from Church's presence more than he did from the exposure it offered him. Certainly in the years to come Church would play a marginal role in Academy affairs, much to the despair and dismay of less-fortunate artists who depended on the Academy for sales and commissions.²⁰ Still, even a finished sketch was better than Church's absence, and in the case of *Twilight, a Sketch*, it proved intriguing enough to provoke reviewers to consider whether it was in fact a full-fledged work of art. Several reviewers dismissed the small painting out of hand, one in particular describing it as "nothing of any consequence."²¹ Others could not decide whether or not *Twilight, a Sketch* was a good piece of painting. The reviewer for the *New York Evening Post* described the work as both "by no means worthy of the author of the 'Heart of the Andes'" and an "effective" sketch in the same paragraph, thereby placing one foot in either camp.²² Clearly Durand's sketch room had opened the door for finished sketches to be considered seriously in direct comparison to easel paintings, a critical first step toward the gradual acceptance of the oil sketch as an independent work of art.

20. See Jervis McEntee's diary, entry for 27 April 1873, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA), reel D180, frame 120; cited in Garnett McCoy, "Jervis McEntee's Diary," *Archives of American Art Journal* 8, nos. 3–4 (July–October 1968): 18.

21. *Porter's Spirit of the Times* (7 May 1859): 149; quoted in Carr, *Olana*, 1:254.

22. *New York Evening Post*, 14 May 1859: 1; quoted in *ibid.*, 1:254.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 32

Iceberg, Newfoundland, June 1859

Oil and graphite on thin board, 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.

Inscribed verso: *Battle Harbor St. Lewis Bay*

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,

Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of

Louis P. Church, 1917-4-296C

Church reinforced the notion that he had joined the ranks of the explorer in the summer of 1859, when he ventured north to the coast of Labrador in search of icebergs. The artist's first attempts to paint an iceberg were frustrated by encroaching fog; painting in a boat pitching on the waters as the viewing conditions deteriorated only made him more determined to succeed in later efforts. Louis Legrand Noble, who accompanied the artist on his voyage, described Church painting on deck, noting that he would paint additional oil sketches in his cabin in an effort to resolve the scene. On deck, the artist sat "with his thin, broad box upon his knees, making his easel of the open lid, . . . dashing in the colors. . . . Again the painter wipes his brushes, puts away his second picture, and tacks a fresh pasteboard within the cover of his box."²³

Spending anywhere from a few brief minutes to several hours on a single sketch,²⁴ Church painted a series of oil sketches of an advancing iceberg against the darker ocean. These undated works form a sequence beginning with long rectangular views dominated by the vacant sea, the narrow strips of water and sky rendered in broad, abstract strokes. The implicit monotony of open ocean is broken in a sketch in which a nearly imperceptible whiteness on the horizon heralds the first sighting of the iceberg (fig. 81). The sheets are soon filled with diminutive white forms far off, the icebergs small against the vastness of the ocean and sky. *Iceberg, Newfoundland* (cat. 32) brings the iceberg slightly closer, under an unsettling coffee-colored sky that enhances the queasy undertones of this foreign "landscape." At least five more panoramic oil sketches of individual bergs

23. Louis Legrand Noble, *After Icebergs with a Painter: A Summer Voyage to Labrador and around Newfoundland* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1979), 255, 258.

24. Noble notes Church spent two hours painting the "Rip van Winkle" iceberg; *ibid.*, 221.

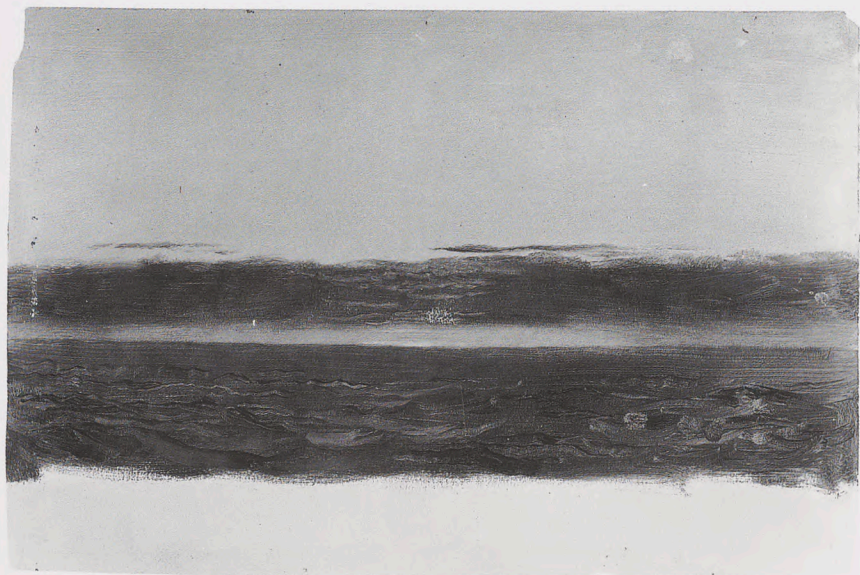


FIG. 81 Frederic Edwin Church, *Seascape* (also known as *Labrador*), ca. 1859. Oil and graphite on paper, $7\frac{1}{16} \times 11\frac{1}{16}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-818

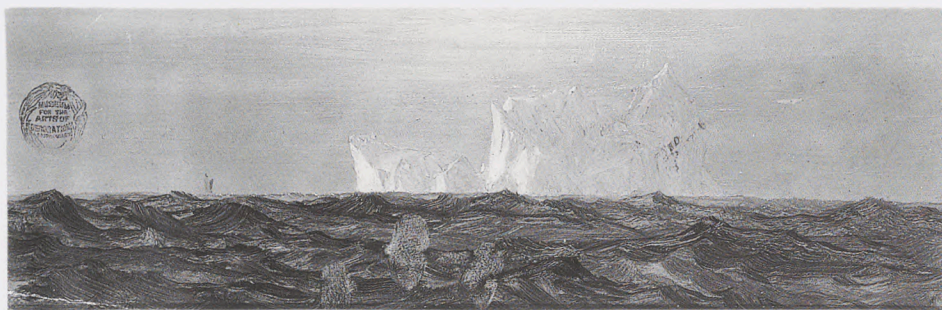


FIG. 82 Frederic Edwin Church, *Icebergs*, June or July 1859. Oil and graphite on paperboard, $4\frac{1}{16} \times 11\frac{1}{8}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-290B

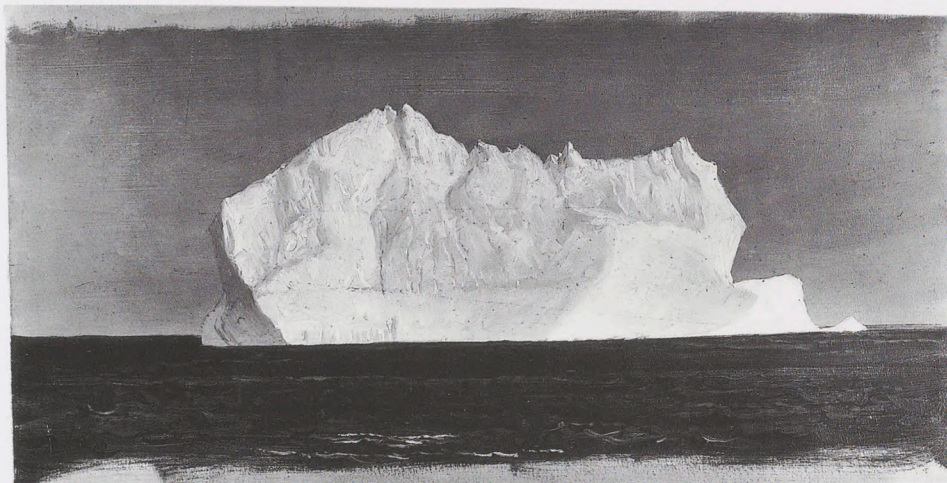


FIG. 83 Frederic Edwin Church, *Floating Iceberg*, June or July 1859. Oil and graphite on board, $7\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{7}{8}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-296A

25. There are at least four other oil sketches of individual icebergs in the Cooper-Hewitt (1917-4-290A, 1917-4-294A, 1917-4-711, and 1917-4-749B).

26. In at least one instance Church drew an iceberg with careful attention to detail, then painted a much more freely handled rendition of the same ice mass on a separate sheet: Church, *Icebergs*, 1 July 1859, graphite on tinted paper with white gouache, and *Two Icebergs*, July 1859, oil with graphite on paperboard (both Cooper-Hewitt).

27. The most extensive research and analysis of Church's trip to Labrador and the artistic activity resulting from the trip is Gerald L. Carr's *Frederic Edwin Church: The Icebergs* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1980), and his article "Beyond the Tip: Some Addenda to Frederic Church's *The Icebergs*," *Arts Magazine* 56 (November 1981): 107-11.

emphasize their mass as they loom tall above the water line.²⁵ In *Icebergs* (fig. 82) Church deftly paints a tiny sailboat to the left of the iceberg, establishing for the first time the massive scale of the floating ice. *Off Iceberg, Newfoundland* (cat. 33) focuses on the subtle play of color on ice, sea, and sky. The opalescent palette creates an ethereal atmosphere, here stressing the breathtaking beauty of water in all three of its states.

These oil sketches are more suggestive than descriptive, markers of Church's increasing familiarity with the ice masses. The haste evident in Church's brushwork underscores the rapidly changing effects of light in the northern latitudes and the prevalent chill on the water. Church did make detailed drawings of individual bergs to note their structure and often used white gouache for highlights.²⁶ His increased familiarity with the structure and mass of these floating mountains becomes evident in his close-up studies of individual bergs. In such sketches as *Floating Iceberg* (fig. 83), Church lavished far greater detail in his articulation of the icy surfaces, his rendering achieving architectonic strength. Clearly these efforts required more time—and calm seas—in which to work. In these oil sketches Church applied the paint to give literal weight and depth to the icebergs, their solid forms standing out against the more fluid, abstract expanses of sky and water.²⁷



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 33

Off Iceberg, Newfoundland, June 1859

Oil and graphite on thin board, $4\frac{1}{16} \times 11\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Inscribed verso: *Off Iceberg / New Foundland*

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,
Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of
Louis P. Church, 1917-4-714B

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 34

A Century Plant at Cotopaxi, Ecuador, 1864

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.

The Century Association, New York, William

Cullen Bryant Collection, 1908

William Cullen Bryant, Thomas Cole's most august friend and supporter, enjoyed singular acclaim as the literary father of the Hudson River school. His sonnet "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe" had urged the young landscape painter to "keep that earlier, wilder image bright,"²⁸ and in so doing had inspired a generation of artists to find merit in the American wilderness landscape. The oil sketch often functioned as that earlier, wilder image for landscape painters, whether painted *en plein air* or in the studio. How appropriate, then, that for Bryant's seventieth birthday his artist-friends, the majority of them landscape painters, would present him with a group of oil sketches.

Church undoubtedly chose his subject bearing in mind that Bryant had taken a leading role in the formation of the Century Association. The century plant (otherwise known as the American agave) got its name from its longevity, which, although impressive, is half a century at best. The century plant is a succulent related to the yucca and thrives in arid conditions; it blooms when it is between fifteen and fifty years old. An enormous plant, at its base it can measure two to five feet across, while the central spike can extend twenty-five to forty feet in the air. After the plant blooms, it dies, and a host of offshoots grows from its base.²⁹ Although the plant's name is an exaggeration, its impressive lifespan and stature carry the connotations of longevity and immortality, while its method of reproduction metaphorically alludes to Bryant's influence on the next generation. In Church's sketch the plant is in flower, and a volcano quietly steams in the background. Church's fascination with plants, evinced by his sketches from South America and Jamaica, centered on plants imbued with spiritual significance (palms) or metaphorical significance, in this case honoring Bryant's contributions to the landscape genre in art and literature.

28. William Cullen Bryant, "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe," 1829; quoted in John McCoubrey, ed., *American Art, 1700–1960: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 96.

29. *Reader's Digest Illustrated Guide to Gardening*, ed. Carroll C. Calkins (Pleasantville, N.Y.: Reader's Digest Association, 1991), 24, 434.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 35

Storm in the Mountains, 1865

Oil and graphite on thin board, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,
Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of
Louis P. Church, 1917-4-351C



The public side of Church's career was balanced by the artist's need for privacy, especially where his family was concerned. The Civil War had torn apart the fabric of a nation raised to believe itself inviolable; for the Church family, 1865 proved the greatest test of its ability to cope with disaster. Following the deaths of their first two children from diphtheria, Frederic and Isabel traveled to Jamaica seeking to heal their spirits. There Church painted a large number of sketches that demonstrate the full range of his talents as an artist and an observer of nature. In no other region of the world did Church paint so many oil sketches that remained independent of a major painting. For the first time, Church began signing his sketches with some frequency, often employing a monogram of his initials during this year, as if to affirm independence from other works of art.

Numerous panoramic views of the Blue Hills project tremendous depth and specificity without sacrificing freedom of handling. *Storm in the Mountains* (cat. 35) exemplifies this effect, the descending storm hovering over the mountaintops, the sunlit haze below



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 36

Cloudy Skies, Sunset, Jamaica, August 1865

Oil on thin board, 10 $\frac{3}{16}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Inscribed and dated lower left: *Jamaica Aug / 65*

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian

Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-409B

brilliant in its intensity. Jamaica presented a magical landscape of humidity and lush foliage, a place of renewal less cataclysmic than the volcanism of South America, but every bit as profound. The ethereal quality of the atmosphere reinforced the sense of quietude and equilibrium being reestablished in the artist's life as well.

Jamaica's dramatic weather provided Church with ample variety for his devotion to sunsets and developing storms, which he documented in a group of sketches showing brilliantly hued sunsets. These vary in detail from the rapidly sketched plein-air *Cloudy Skies, Sunset, Jamaica* (cat. 36) to the carefully articulated studio sketch *Sunset, Jamaica* (cat. 37). The differences between these two are pronounced. *Cloudy Skies, Sunset, Jamaica* is a quintessential plein-air sketch, recording a rapidly changing effect with as much energy and speed as the artist could muster. The effusive brushwork is charged with that energy, and Church has not reworked the sketch to enhance or correct any of its parts. The dramatic banks of clouds, lit by the rays of the dying sun, presented a scene Church would be drawn to well into the twilight of his life.

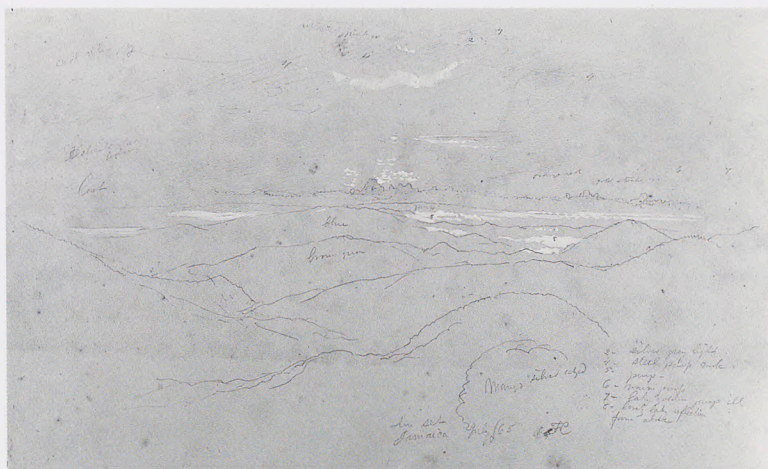


FIG. 84 Frederic Edwin Church, *Sunset, Jamaica, West Indies*, July 1865. Graphite and white gouache on gray paper, $10\frac{3}{4} \times 17\frac{1}{2}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-690



FIG. 85 Frederic Edwin Church, *The After Glow*, 1867. Oil on canvas, $31\frac{1}{4} \times 48\frac{3}{8}$ in. Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1981.48.A

Sunset, Jamaica is a more deliberately composed sunset scene, based on a preliminary sketch made in pencil. The pencil sketch (fig. 84) captured the scene as it transpired; the oil sketch was made in the studio so that the artist could paint the impressive effects he described as "so extraordinary that I might not see similar again."³⁰ This more finished oil sketch served as the preliminary study for *The After Glow* (fig. 85), where the setting sun serves as an apt metaphor for the melancholy the Churches experienced that summer. Gerald Carr has with great poignancy identified the spiritual significance of this particular sunset for Church, linking it to Thomas Cole's belief in the spreading rays of sunlight as an evocation of spiritual grace, and thus a benediction for a man grieving the loss of two children.³¹

30. Church to his father, Joseph Church, 3 October 1867. Olana Archives.

31. Church painted *The After Glow* as his memorial picture for his sister, Charlotte, who died that year as well. See Carr, *Olana*, 1:293.

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 37

Sunset, Jamaica (study for *The After Glow*), 1865

Oil on paper mounted on linen, 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office
of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation,
OL.1981.26.A.B





Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 38

Palm Trees, West Indies, June 1865

Oil and graphite on thin board, 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.

Inscribed lower left: *Jamaica / June 65*

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian

Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-674B

Church had developed an especial fondness for palm trees in South America on his trips in 1853 and 1857, an interest he explored anew in Jamaica in 1865. His highly detailed yet delicate oil sketches of Jamaican palms have a lush surface commensurate with their presentation as objects of aesthetic delight, but contain botanical accuracy to warm the heart of any scientist. In *Palm Trees, West Indies* the artist articulated both the texture of the bark and the impressive canopy of palm fronds. This loosely painted example presents the finest qualities of Church's oil sketches, in which acute powers of observation work in tandem with painterly flair. The delight with which Church painted these individual plants conveys the exhilaration he found in nature's forms. Jamaica returned Church to the fundament of his craft, reaffirming and reassuring the underlying purpose of his own existence.

Tuckerman paid particular attention to Church's work from this trip, calling the sketches

admirable effects of sunset, storm, and mist, caught in all their evanescent but characteristic phases; . . . besides these general features, there are minute and elaborate studies of vegetation . . . in a word, all the materials of a tropical, insular landscape, with every local trait carefully noted.³²

Their personal nature, whether apparent in the delight of closely observed plants or the awe inherent in a sweeping panorama, focused less on nature's forces than on her forms. As relative of but less foreign than the more sublime tropical array of South America, Jamaica offered peace and reflection for the artist and his wife.

32. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1867), 386.

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 39

Bedouins in Camp at Night, February 1868

Oil on thin board, $9\frac{1}{8} \times 13\frac{1}{16}$ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,

Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of

Louis P. Church, 1917-4-425A

In 1868 Church, accompanied by his wife, mother-in-law, and two-year-old son, traveled to Europe and the Middle East. One of Church's goals was to see and sketch the ancient temples at Petra, which would require a monthlong round trip journey on camelback under the auspices of a local guide. Church's interest in Palestine stemmed in part from a desire to see the relics of earliest civilizations, biblical artifacts that complemented his search for the roots of creation in natural forces.

Leaving his family in Beirut, Church embarked for Petra. While in Palestine Church restricted his plein-air work to pencil for most of the ten days it took to travel by camel to Petra, mainly in deference to the rapid pace of the caravan. Well aware of the Islamic prohibitions against graven images, Church did not openly sketch his guides in any medium. To satisfy his need for color sketches, he painted in oils surreptitiously from within his tent. In his diary Church detailed each day's activities, and on one especially pleasant evening wrote, "Never saw so picturesque a scene as these Arabs sitting by the camp fire smoking and the camels lying close by also enjoying the warmth and chewing their cud[s]. their huge forms looked still huger in the vague light[.]"³³ The following night the scene repeated itself, and Church "made a more elaborate sketch by candlelight for the purpose of fixing these details now fresh in my memory."³⁴ Church may have made this oil sketch after penning his thoughts on the previous evening; certainly it conveys the covert nature of the artist's oil sketches.

At Petra Church worked quietly in pencil, one morning sketching "from a chink in my tent some of the rocks and tombs within sight in oil colors—I did this because I was fearful that I might be prevented by force from sketching and I was anxious to secure some studies in color."³⁵ This small sketch of the Bedouins and their camels by firelight—its diminutive scale and abraded surface both characteristic of the artist's field sketches—conveys the sense of rapid execution Church was forced to practice from within his tent.

33. Church's Petra diary, 27–28. Olana Archives.

34. Ibid., 39.

35. Ibid., 65.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 40

View of Ed Deir, Petra, Jordan, February 1868
Oil and graphite on thick paper, 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-485B



On 24 February 1868, the day before he reached Petra, Church got his first glimpse of Ed Deir temple, which he described as “a temple form cut into the rock—it was too distant to make out the details except through the glass. It was El Deir [*sic*] which disclosed a Roman style apparently influenced by the style peculiar to Petra—I made a slight sketch—but our guide was much exercised thereby and made significant motions that It was unsafe I might be fired at—This danger was exceedingly slight as we were on the top of a high mountain But I desisted as I was not interested in so distant a spot.”³⁶ The following day the party made camp at Petra and “started for El Deir which lies diagonally opposite to the Khasné across the valley where the city formerly stood.” Describing the temple’s color as “a delicate yellowish drab,”³⁷ Church concluded Ed Deir (the artist mistakenly spelled it El Deir) was inferior to the Khasné temple, the former’s unfinished architectural ornament further suffering from exposure to the weather.

Church’s oil sketch of the temple is freely painted, concentrating on the overall architectural lines of the structure rather than its decorative elements. The wet-on-wet surface denotes a single campaign of artistic activity, conducted, as Church recalled, on a cold day, the smoke and ash from the warming fire “somewhat detrimental to the sketch.”³⁸

36. Church’s Petra diary, 55–56. Olana Archives.

37. *Ibid.*, 71–73.

38. *Ibid.*, 73 and 78.

FIG. 86 Frederic Edwin Church, *El Khasné, Petra, Jordan*, February 1868. Oil and graphite on paperboard, 12 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-485A



Despite his guide's warnings and his own trepidations, Church was able to inflect this sketch with a grace and ease of execution, the sure strokes of paint a measure of the artist's growing confidence in sketching undisturbed.

The level of detail in this work does not match that of Church's depictions of El Khasné, for which the artist made numerous sketches in pencil and in oil; clearly Ed Deir was a site of secondary importance to his already evolving ideas for future easel paintings. At the Khasné temple, Church also worked under the watchful eyes of his guides. Steeling himself for any opposition to his sketching, Church hoped he had built the goodwill necessary to make his trip a success. In a letter to Erastus Dow Palmer, Church wrote,

I deliberately opened my three legged stool sat upon it opened my sketch book spread out the paper sharpened the pencil took a square look at the Temple and an askant one at the Bedawins and made my first line—They made no motion, and after a few rapid touches I felt the mystery was solved in my favor—I could sketch without let or hindrance a freedom unaccorded before.³⁹

Church's being allowed to work *en plein air* let him swiftly capture the contours of the temple and the brilliant colors of the sandstone. To William H. Osborn Church wrote,

I had been assured by the best authorities that I would not be allowed to sketch—as they had superstitious notions. Moreover a cheerful anecdote of a traveller who was shot when attempting a pencil sketch was told me just before leaving Jerusalem—so I naturally was apprehensive lest I should be prevented from doing what I solely took the trip for. . . . The Arabs got a glimmering of what I was about and the next day when I attempted color—they were delighted. We stayed two days. Of course I haven't a great deal of oil sketches to show . . . I made a quantity of pencil studies.⁴⁰

That he relied heavily on pencil drawings is clear in a comparison of two sets of sketches, one in pencil, liberally sprinkled with color notes, and the other an oil sketch, likely painted in several campaigns back at camp or later in the trip. Of El Khasné (figs. 86, 87), Church's rapid, hurried handling gives a sense of his anxiety, and his triumph at being allowed to sketch there. Once again, Church's facility for line and his color memory served him well, as half the drawing sheet is occupied with details of capitals and architecture that are only suggested in the body of the drawing, accompanied by the color notes he used to paint the oil sketch.

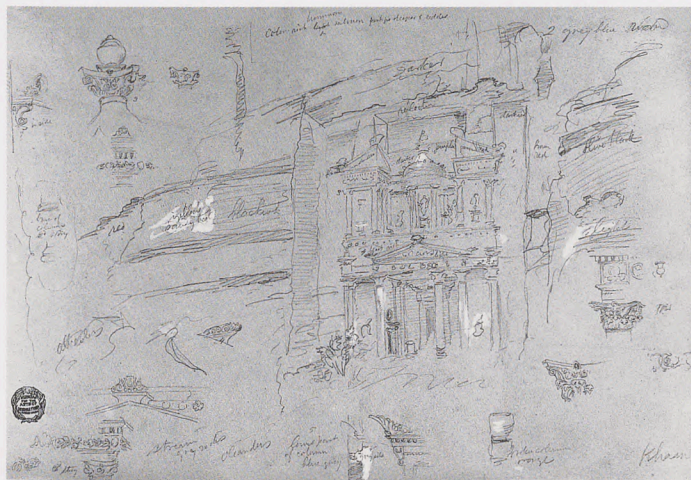


FIG. 87 Frederic Edwin Church, *El Khasné, Petra, Jordan*, 26 February 1868. Graphite and white gouache on olive green paper, 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 15 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-486

39. Church to Palmer, 10 March 1868. Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art, N.Y. (Albany Institute).

40. Church to Osborn, Jerusalem, 1 April 1868. Olana Archives.

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 41

Study of a Zoomorphic Rock, Petra, February 1868

Oil and graphite on thin board, 12 × 19¹⁵/₁₆ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian

Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church,

1917-4-585

In a letter to William Osborn, written from Jerusalem in April 1868, Church recalled,

I forgot to mention when speaking of Petra of the splendid colors in the rocks—ribbons of bright & beautiful colors winding & twisting & interlacing like marbled paper—red, orange, yellow, greenish blue, purple with endless gradations. Petra will paint up strikingly. It is time for me to start my sketching & you can't regret abrupt closing of a long letter.⁴¹

At various points in Church's career his oil sketches take on a level of painterly bravura and near abstraction of form, which, out of context, seem quite modern. Charged with an energy and vibrancy unlike that found in many of his oil sketches of Palestine, *Study of a Zoomorphic Rock, Petra* is less a sketch of geologic character than an exuberant essay on the joys of painting things that rivet one's attention.⁴² The cadence of Church's written description is matched by his deft manipulation of the brush, weaving colors together without losing their integrity in a sea of wet-on-wet paint. The startling clarity of color and articulation of form is ample testament to Church's impressive facility with plein-air painting.

In the same letter Church remarked, "If I go to Petra I should figure after a cursory glance at Jerusalem, enough to learn the paints, &c." It was not enough to have read voraciously on his destination; as an artist Church recognized that he would need to acclimatize more than his body to a new climate. The Holy Land would require a palette far different from that required to do justice to the lush and humid volcanics of South America or the frozen and refractive Arctic. His mentioning this need to take the time to learn how to set his palette in this differently hued world marks a pragmatic consideration rarely expressed in Church's correspondence. It also acknowledges the kind of preparation the artist made for times when he knew he would need to work at some speed *en plein air*; given the rapid pace of the camel caravan or the possibility of disapproval from his guides. A sketch like this one might have enabled Church to set his palette for later work derived from his on-site sketches, as the ribbed rocks provide both the geologic character of the region and its prevalent hues, enabling the artist to secure a study useful on both counts.

41. Church to Osborn, Alexandria, Egypt, 6 January 1868. Olana Archives.

42. Church waxed eloquent on the colors of the rock formations in his Petra diary, and in letters written to Palmer as well as to Osborn. In his diary he noted "the most fascinating play of colors ribbons of graded tints crossed by bar Red-blues greenish-yellow orange-purple all colors interlaced and following in the most exquisite manner the undulating surfaces of the rock." Church's Petra diary, 23 February 1868. Olana Archives.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 42

Königssee, Bavaria, July 1868

Oil and graphite on thin board, 11¼ × 12⅞ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-562B



The greater number of Church's oil sketches made in Germany are of the deep glacial lakes and vertiginous mountain slopes of the Alpine region near Berchtesgaden, where the Church family spent several weeks during July and August 1868. Having just returned from his tour of the Middle East, Church traded the sere, panoramic vistas of Palestine for lush Alpine elevations. Much taken by the dramatic setting, Church painted a group of oil sketches of two lakes, Königssee and Obersee. *Königssee, Bavaria* features a steep view down to the lake, the bare outcrop known as the Kreuzelwand on the right. A tiny boat establishes the scale, emphasizing the sheer drop of the surrounding cliffs. From his elevated vantage point Church has captured both the claustrophobic qualities of the canyonlike setting of the lake and the expansive scale of the landscape. The nearly square format enhances the steepness of the slopes, the effect rather like that of a fjord.

Church painted a significant number of pencil drawings and oil sketches during his relatively brief stay in the region.⁴³ From Berchtesgaden, Church wrote to William Osborn that he spent "the day at Königsee Lake—12 to 15 hours daily—sketching furiously. . . . I haven't wasted my opportunities on this lake—although in my anxiety to get everything I may have sketched too hurriedly."⁴⁴ His concerns may have been borne out by the damage that ensued, perhaps as Church packed the oil sketches when the family left Germany. Many of the oil sketches ended up sticking together or leaving edge lines

43. Gerald Carr has written extensively about Church's sketches from Germany in Carr, *Olana*, 1:304, 325–30.

44. Church to Osborn, Berchtesgaden, 29 July 1868. Olana Archives.

in the soft paint where they were stacked atop each other (fig. 88). The speed with which Church worked may have been necessitated by inclement weather in concert with his relatively brief stay. The rain he encountered may have forced him either to paint while the weather was damp or to sketch quickly when the weather cleared. The prevalence of surface bloom in the paint points to the artist's use of a commercial drier, which can cause this effect.⁴⁵ Ironically, too much drier can retard drying,⁴⁶ thereby counteracting the intent behind its use at all. Prior to his arrival in Germany, Church's most extensive bouts of oil sketching had taken place in the Middle East, a significantly warmer and drier climate. Church mentioned to Osborn that he adjusted his paints in Beirut; he may have altered the makeup of his palette to accommodate different colors and probably used a higher proportion of medium to counteract the drier air. Those practices would have backfired in Germany.

Church's more finished oil sketches of the German lakes traveled unscathed, allowing the artist the pleasure of framing and hanging as many as five of them at Olana during the 1870s.⁴⁷ Others he reserved as gifts to friends and family members, making this a subject more personal than most. He made no major painting from these sketches, apparently preferring to retain the subjects for private contemplation.

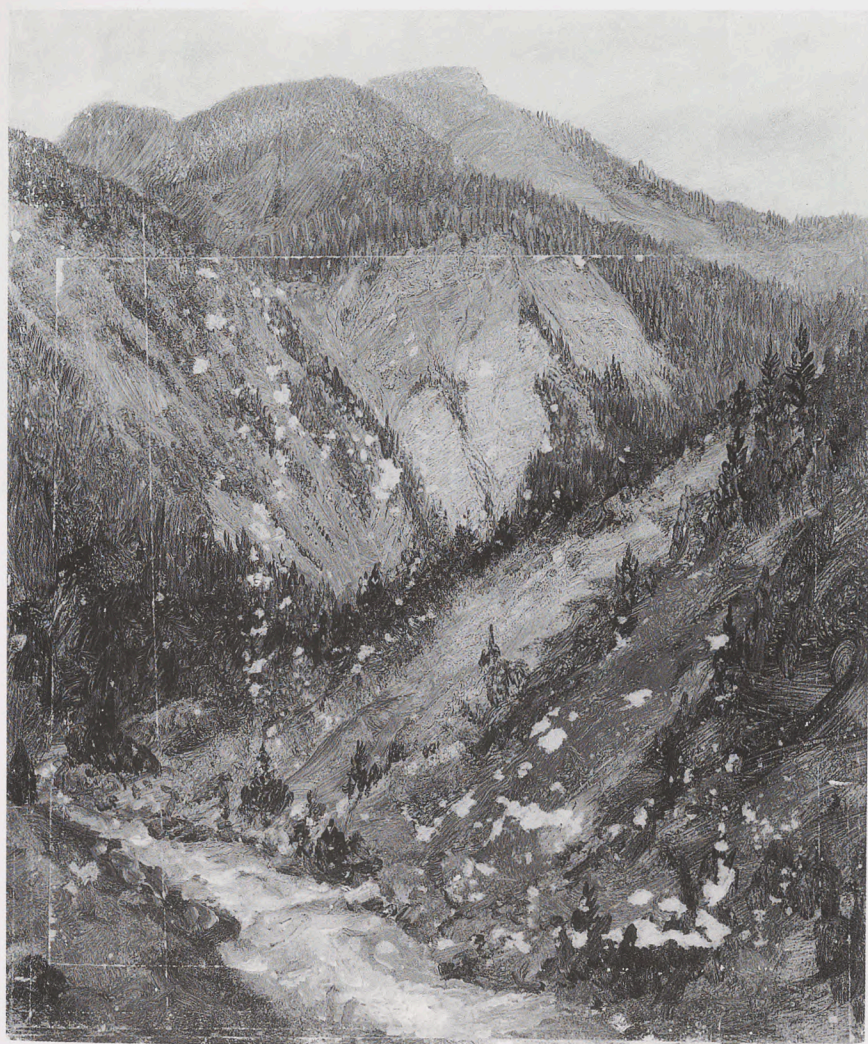


FIG. 88 Frederic Edwin Church, *European Mountain Landscape*, ca. 1868. Oil and graphite on thin board, $11\frac{1}{4} \times 9\frac{3}{8}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-287B

45. Joyce Zucker, "From the Ground Up," Bierstadt symposium, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 24 January 1992.

46. Leslie Carlyle, "Paint Driers Discussed in Nineteenth-Century British Oil Painting Manuals," Bierstadt symposium, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 24 January 1992.

47. See Carr, *Olana*, 1:304.

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 43

Broken Column, the Parthenon, Athens, April 1869

Oil and graphite on thin cream board, $10\frac{15}{16} \times 15\frac{3}{16}$ in.

Inscribed near bottom margin, left: *Parthenon / 69*
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-574A



FIG. 89 Frederic Edwin Church, *Column and Entablature Fragments, Athens*, April 1869. Graphite on gray paper, $4\frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{9}{16}$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-577

Prior to his departure for Europe, Church had studied the architecture of ancient Greek monuments, captivated in particular by the Parthenon as the epitome of classical thought and culture. For two weeks, between 10 and 24 April 1869, the artist visited Athens, where he indulged his delight and fascination with the remnants of antiquity, painting and drawing columns, both standing and in ruins.⁴⁸ Church sketched the buildings on the Acropolis extensively and rapidly. It appears likely that he approached his task by first making a series of pencil drawings, experimenting with vantage points and architectural details before embarking on a suite of oil sketches. The correlation between pencil and oil sketches of the Parthenon is especially pronounced, with drawings matching up with painted sketches in at least four instances. *Broken Column, the Parthenon, Athens* (cat. 43) and the drawing *Column and Entablature Fragments, Athens* (fig. 89) form one such pair, wherein the architectural details articulated in pencil are lost in the

48. Church to Osborn, Athens, 14 April 1869. Olana Archives.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 44

North Peristyle, Parthenon, Athens, April 1869

Oil and graphite on thin board, 12¹⁵/₁₆ × 10 in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-573B

play of paint. In the oil sketch the buttery hues of the column drums emphasize the solidity of their forms and their surface textures. Faint pencil lines are still visible through the paint to mark where Church carefully drew the columnar fragments, now a synecdoche of the fall of empire.

North Peristyle, Parthenon, Athens (cat. 44) presents a sharply foreshortened view down the gallery; the lowering sky enhances the sense of drama created by the vertical composition. The standing columns and entablature at the end of the peristyle bisect the view into the distance; the viewer must look up to see the open sky. Church's fascination with the temple's architectural structure and its state of decay appears to be a meditation on the fall of empire as much as it results in studies of specific features. In adopting this approach, he created a group of sketches intended as much for his own pleasure as for incorporating aspects of them in later paintings.



Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 45

Evening Twilight, ca. 1870

Oil on thin board, 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,
Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of
Louis P. Church, 1917-4-736

In 1872 the Church family moved into the second floor of Olana, and Church made a succession of sketches in pencil and oil of the house and the grounds. An oil sketch developed from one of his drawings shows the completed house framed by foliage (fig. 90), its site and surroundings as carefully composed as any of the artist's paintings.⁴⁹ In depicting his new home, Church took advantage of the spectacular scenery, and in *Clouds over Olana* (cat. 46) showed the newly constructed house situated atop its hill, surmounted by crimson and white clouds touched by the last rays of the sun. This sketch, and another similar to it, is inscribed with the butt of the brush *FE.C—Aug 1872*.⁵⁰ Gerald Carr has connected these two works to a comment Church made in a letter to Erastus Dow Palmer, remarking on the "splendid sky effects" of 19 August.⁵¹

Church had spent much of 1870 and 1871 supervising construction of his house and painting the landscape. Clearly relishing his new abode and its views, he painted at least

49. A drawing corresponding closely to this view is in the Cooper-Hewitt (1917-4-619).

50. The corresponding sketch is in the Cooper-Hewitt (1917-4-587).

51. Church to Palmer, Hudson, 19 August 1872. Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, Albany Institute; cited in Carr, *Olana*, 1:382.

five oil sketches dated June 1870, concentrating once again on the effects in the skies.⁵² Church's joy in painting his landscape did not abate, and the following month he rapidly painted another set of sunsets. A pencil drawing dated 1 July 1870 contains an evocative list of colors, suggesting Church perceived the vibrant hues of sunset and approaching twilight with great intensity (fig. 91). References to "rich red orange," green, "smoky purple," and "delicious milky blue" may have been the starting point for a series of very loosely painted sunsets, including one painted the following night.⁵³ An undated sketch titled *Evening Twilight* (cat. 45) may date from this time as well. In it, nearly abstract swirls of color denote foliage and cloud alike. *Evening Twilight* takes its palette from the color notations on that pencil sketch of 1 July and with saturated colors renders the landscape as barely recognizable forms, the sketch vibrating with color and stroke in a manner unique to this moment in Church's life.

52. Carr cites this and several letters in which Church remarked on the scenery. To Palmer, Church wrote of "so many cloud effects." Church to Palmer, Hudson, N.Y., 7 June 1870. Erastus Dow Palmer Papers, Albany Institute; cited in Carr, *Olana*, 1:349.

53. *Sunset from Olana*, 2 July 1870, oil on off-white academy board, 11 1/8 x 15 1/8 in. (Olana State Historic Site, OL.1976.8). See Carr, *Olana*, 1:349–50.

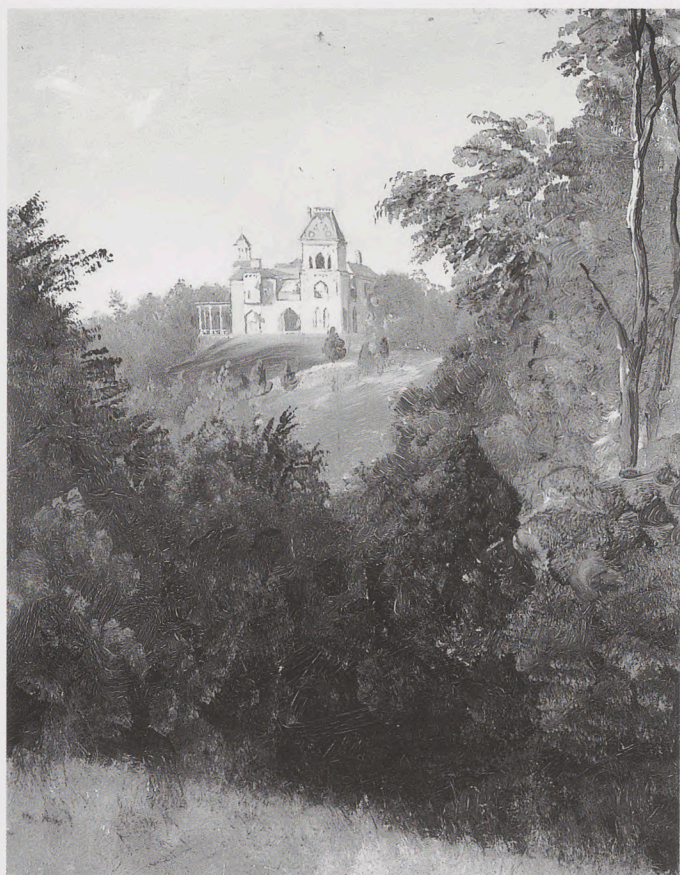


FIG. 90 Frederic Edwin Church, *Olana from the Southwest*, ca. 1872. Oil on thin board, 12 ³/₁₆ x 9 ¹/₂ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-666

FIG. 91 Frederic Edwin Church, *Sunset from Olana*, 1 July 1870. Graphite on white paper, 9 ¹/₈ x 12 ³/₈ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-282

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 46

Clouds over Olana, August 1872

Oil on paper, 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Signed and dated lower center: *F.E.C Aug—1872*

Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of
Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, OL.1976.1



The winter months afforded equally compelling vignettes of fog-shrouded trees and snow-covered hills seen from the warm confines of the main house. Church spent the winter of 1871 making “a study from my studio window of a sunset or twilight nearly every day,”⁵⁴ the exuberance in the play of the brush across these sketches ample testimony to the delight Church took in their making. The broadly brushed hues of *Winter Landscape with Full Moon* (cat. 47) are indicative of the haste with which Church worked to capture the wan light. Never one to miss a glorious sunset, in another sketch Church dipped his brush in bright, burnished colors to paint the last rays of light on the frozen pond (fig. 92), the gilded reflection on the ice framing the surrounding stand of trees.

54. Church to Martin Johnson Heade, Hudson, N.Y., 8 February 1871. AAA, reel D5, frames 655–57.

Frederic Edwin Church

CAT. 47

Winter Landscape with Full Moon, 1870–75

Oil on thin board, $4\frac{1}{16} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum,
Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of
Louis P. Church, 1917–4–733



FIG. 92 Frederic Edwin Church, *Church's Farm, Hudson, New York*, ca. 1870–80. Oil on thin paper, $10\frac{1}{16} \times 13$ in. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917–4–508A



Jasper Francis Cropsey

CAT. 48

Evening at Paestum, 1856

Oil on panel, 10 × 16 in.

Signed and dated lower right: *J. F. Cropsey 1856*

Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College,
Poughkeepsie, NY, gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.21



In 1856 the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon arranged to purchase sixty small paintings by America's leading landscape painters. He chose landscape painting deliberately for its moral message, because for him the genre reinforced his beliefs in the country's virtues. Particularly intrigued with the seasons of the year and varied features including rocks and water, Magoon went so far as to specify individual sites he preferred along the Hudson River and in New England. In all Magoon acquired one hundred American paintings and oil sketches, and of those works commissioned or bought outright, only a handful were not views of American scenery. Among those exceptions were European landscapes by Gifford (see cats. 55, 56) and Cropsey and a South American scene by Church (see chap. 4, 86–88).

Cropsey painted his small panel *Evening at Paestum* eight years after visiting the site with his wife, Maria, in August 1848. Fellow artist and traveling companion Christopher Pearse Cranch recorded his reaction to the massive Doric temples: "Mysterious, beautiful temples! Far in the desert, by the sea-sands, in a country cursed by malaria, the only unblighted and perfect things,—standing there for over two thousand years. It was almost like going to Greece."¹ As evening approached, the visitors made haste to depart for Naples, for nightfall signaled the increased danger of exposure to malaria. Cropsey's moody evocation of the deserted marshes surrounding the temples takes place under a fading sunset, with a crescent moon and the first few stars appearing in the darkening sky. The sense of desolation expressed in the scene serves as a reminder that nature had all but reclaimed this nearly forgotten landmark.

Cropsey's interest in painting the temples may have been due in part to his early training as an architect. Certainly he was able to render the temple structure with ease. As Kathleen Mathews Hohlstein has noted, the artist added a few romantic flourishes: although much of the temple was still intact, he painted it with broken columns and a collapsed architrave, enhancing the sense of abandonment and decay.² Cropsey returned to this subject several times during the following two decades, using this sketch as a guide for a larger version now at the Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. Cropsey actually sold two versions of this oil sketch to Magoon, the first on 27 February 1856 for thirty dollars, and then a duplicate of the sketch for fifty dollars in November 1856.³ Magoon displayed his first version in his home at a private soirée in late February, shortly after receiving it, and then lent it to the spring 1856 NAD exhibition. The current whereabouts of the second sketch and the reason behind its purchase are unknown.

1. Quoted in Leonora Cranch Scott, *The Life and Letters of Christopher Pearse Cranch* (Boston and New York, 1917), 147.

2. For a thorough discussion of Cropsey's paintings of Paestum, and the appeal of this site for American artists traveling in Italy, see Kathleen Mathews Hohlstein's entry for *Evening at Paestum* and *Temple of Paestum by Moonlight*, in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., et al., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760–1914* (New York: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 267–69.

3. Samuel P. Avery also noted to Cropsey that "Dr. E. L. Magoon called in to see me. . . he had received your duplicate Paestum of which I suppose you have heard from him." Samuel P. Avery to Jasper F. Cropsey, Sunday, 25 October 1856. Photocopy of transcript in the correspondence files, Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

Jasper Francis Cropsey

CAT. 49

The Lake, 1864

Oil on canvas, 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Signed and dated lower right: *J. F. Cropsey 1864*

The Century Association, New York, William Cullen

Bryant Collection, 1908

4. "Preliminary Informal Meeting of the Artist-Members of the Century Club, October 20th, 1864." The Century Archives, New York. The album was also intended for each artist to sign a page indicating his intent to present a "finished sketch" when it was completed. See chap. 4, 85 for further discussion of Bryant's party, and cats. 34 and 50.

5. "The Bryant Album," *New York Evening Post*, 16 January 1865, 2.

Thirty-four of the painted sketches presented to William Cullen Bryant on his seventieth birthday hung at the Century Club, displayed in matching mounts designed to be placed in Bryant's commemorative album.⁴ The *New York Evening Post* made note of the installation and took the opportunity to provide an informal critique of the oil sketches. Cropsey's contribution, described as "an autumnal scene, with high clouds and gaily tinted foliage," was not linked to any of Bryant's poems, as was the case with the works by McEntee and others.⁵

Cropsey excelled at conveying a sense of the temperature and barometric pressure of autumn and winter in his paintings, notably in his oil sketches. The latent chill of the season in this autumnal sketch, mitigated by the last burst of fall color, parallels the "season" of Bryant's own life, at age seventy. Cropsey's sketch of a lake is painted in a delightfully subtle palette of muted blues, pinks, and grays, capturing the essence of a bright early winter's day.





Jervis McEntee

CAT. 50

Early Spring (also known as *Autumn Landscape*), 1864

Oil on canvas, 6¼ × 10½ in.

Signed and dated lower right: *JMcE* [in monogram] / 1864

The Century Association, New York, William Cullen Bryant Collection, 1908

"Mr. McEntee offers a distinct phase of the poetic temperament in landscape art, . . . In sentiment, Mr. McEntee's feeling for nature is parallel with Bryant's—a subdued, yet intense enjoyment of that phase of nature which appeals strongly to the memories and the affections."¹ The critic's description of McEntee's oeuvre might well have been written with this oil sketch in mind. The complementary comparison between McEntee's paintings and Bryant's writings seems especially appropriate given the purpose of this sketch. According to the *New York Evening Post*, McEntee's painting is an illustration of lines from Bryant's poem "The Return of the Birds":

Brown meadows and the russet hill
Not yet the haunt of grazing herds,
And thickets by the glimmering rill,
Are alive with birds.²

For an artist of McEntee's sensibilities, particularly with his interest in conveying nuanced meaning through the atmosphere portrayed and the titles of his paintings, such direct allusion to one of Bryant's poems suggests how seriously the artist took this celebration of Bryant's life.³ McEntee's apposite sketch attests to the importance he accorded such occasions; this thoughtfulness is additionally evidenced by his diary entries and letters discussing his faithful observance of obligations and celebrations.

1. John F. Weir, "Article VIII.—American Landscape Painters," *New Englander and Yale Review* 32 (January 1873): 148, 150. Weir republished this article in "Group 27. Plastic and Graphic Art. Painting and Sculpture," *U.S. Centennial Commission, International Exhibition, 1876, Reports and Awards*, ed. Francis A. Walker (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1877), 8:25–28.

2. "The Bryant Album," *New York Evening Post*, 16 January 1865, 2.

3. See chap. 4, 85 for further discussion of Bryant's party, and cats. 34 and 49.



Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 51

Lake Nemi, 1856

Oil and pencil on paper mounted on canvas,
6 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Private collection

On 5 October 1856 Gifford set out on foot from Rome for Lake Nemi. Late in the afternoon the following day he arrived at the lake's northern shore, which he described as "a deep cavity in the mountains (over the crater of a volcano), [that] is fringed with fine trees which droop into its waters; back of these rise the lofty banks, in parts richly wooded, in parts showing the bare cliffs." After circumambulating the lake he arrived at the town of Nemi, "a very picturesque little village which is hung over the cliffs."¹ That afternoon he made a series of pencil sketches in his sketchbook (fig. 93) and made arrangements to stay the night in the local hotel. Gifford described the view from his hotel room window:

The view from our window in the evening was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. We were high up above the lake. On one side in the foreground were some picturesque houses and ruined walls—a tall, dark cypress, rising out of a rich mass of foliage, cut strongly against the lake, distance and sky. Far below, the still lake reflected the full moon, and the heights of the further shore which, crested by the walls and Campanile of Gensano, were relieved richly against the light and misty expanse of the Campagna, while still farther beyond, a long line of silver light, the reflection of the moon, told where the sea was.²

1. Gifford's journal, entry for 7 October, in his letter dated 15 October 1856. Gifford kept a daily journal on each of his European trips that he then sent to his father as a series of letters. A transcript of these letters is in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA), reel D21.

2. Ibid. Gifford's traveling companion was also an artist, a Mr. E. R. Smith.

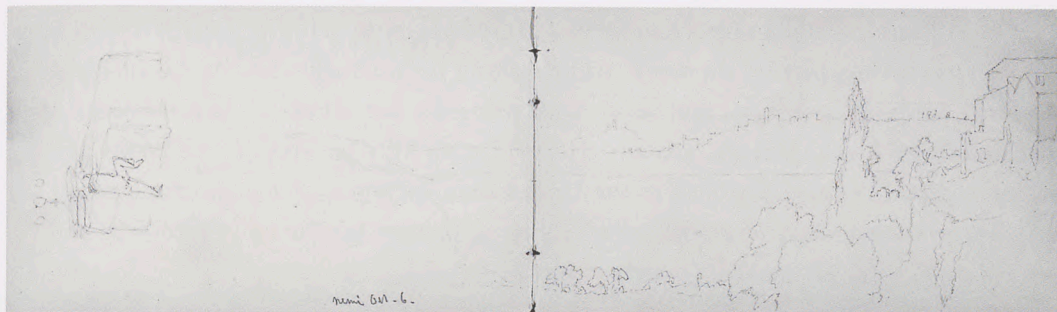


FIG. 93 Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Nemi*, 5 October 1856. Pencil on paper, $3\frac{7}{16} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$ in. Private collection

The following day Gifford made his first oil sketch of the lake, signed and dated 7 October (unlocated).³ It is likely that he also painted the smaller of the two known oil sketches (cat. 51) while he was on site.⁴ The vibrant, staccato brushwork and varied palette in this sketch are more typical of the artist's plein-air work; in his intermediate studio sketches Gifford began the process of tonal unification endemic to his finished paintings. Gifford described the vista seen in his sketches, although the artist altered the light from that of the moon to the pale humid sunset found in all known painted versions of the scene.

After the exhilaration of his trip to Nemi, Gifford returned to Rome and began unpacking his trunk, which had arrived from Paris with the previous year's sketches. The closing line of his daily letter reads: "15th. Unpacked my oil sketches made last summer and winter; found many of them stuck together, and some spoiled."⁵ Gifford, who usually wrote lengthy descriptions of his daily activities, ceased writing for over three months. During the long silence he tried to work on several canvases, including his largest painting to date, *Lake Nemi* (cat. 53). He began that process within a week of his depressing discovery, painting an intermediate oil sketch dated 21 October 1856 that served as his template (cat. 52).

During the winter Gifford struggled with depression, brought on in part by his artistic losses, the cold and rainy weather, and the extended separation from his family during the holidays.⁶ The winter did nothing to improve his spirits, but in February Gifford resumed his correspondence and described progress on his work. In his first letter to his father Gifford apologized for the lengthy silence, explaining,

I should have written before, but it is very hard to write when one feels that he has nothing good or pleasant to write about—and such has been the case with me for a long while. I have not been well in either mind or body, and have suffered much from depression of spirits. This has delayed and injured my work, which has made the matter worse. I seem to be doing so little good in my studio that I often think it would be better for me to leave it. . . . Were the spring open I would seek some relief in the variety and excitement of travel.⁷

3. Ibid.

4. The author's entry on *Lake Nemi* in *The Lure of Italy* suggests this sketch might have been painted at a later date in the studio, a conclusion that now appears to be incorrect. See Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., et al., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760–1914* (New York: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 298 n. 8.

5. Gifford's journal, entry for 15 October 1856, in his letter of the same date. As a result of the damage, Gifford's memorial catalogue lists only three oil sketches for the entire time Gifford spent in France. They are nos. 83, 84, and 85. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *A Memorial Catalogue of the Paintings of Sanford Robinson Gifford, N.A.* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1881; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1974), 3.

6. "Hudson is then at least 6000 miles distant, and it appears to be 4 or 5 years since I was there. I don't like to be so far away from Hudson, nor so long away." Gifford's journal, entry for 11 March 1857, in his letter of the same date.

7. Gifford's journal, entry for 5 February 1857, in his letter of the same date.

8. *A Sketch of Villa Malta, Rome* was described in the memorial catalogue "as seen from Mr. Gifford's studio" and is dated 14 February 1857; *Memorial Catalogue*, 18. Another depicting a villa on the Campagna is dated 16 February 1857 (Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York).

9. Gifford's journal, entry for 17 April, in his letter dated 22 May 1857.

10. Gifford's journal, entry for 22 May 1857, in his letter of the same date.

Gifford recovered his spirits as the social season got under way, attending carnivals, festas, and balls in and around Rome, in the company of friends. Several dated oil sketches Gifford painted during February also suggest his gradual improvement.⁸

On 17 March Gifford noted that he had glazed his large painting *Lake Nemi* because he was close to completing the work. After making his final adjustments, he varnished the large painting on 4 April and on 17 April painted a last oil sketch of *Lake Nemi* (unlocated) for Lizzie Mulock, a family friend.⁹ On 22 May he wrote to his family that he had shipped the painting back to the United States along with his accumulated oil sketches, photographs, and guidebooks,¹⁰ marking closure for the most turbulent and rewarding chapter in the artist's early career.



Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 52

Lake Nemi, 1856

Oil and pencil on canvas, 10³/₈ × 14¹/₄ in.

Signed and dated lower left: *SRG Rome Oct. 21. '56*—

Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.

Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 53

Lake Nemi, 1856–57

Oil on canvas, 39% × 60% in.

The Toledo Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from
the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in Memory of her
Father, Maurice A. Scott, 57.46





Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 54

Mount Mansfield, 1858

Oil and pencil on canvas, 7 × 14 in.

Signed and dated lower left: *S R Gifford 1858*

The George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum,
Springfield, Massachusetts, 1.23.35

Gifford returned from Europe in 1857, and the following summer he headed into the field for a reunion with American scenery. Toward the end of that trip he and fellow artist Richard Hubbard climbed Mount Mansfield, the highest point in Vermont's Green Mountains. An anonymous writer, who may have been Hubbard, extolled the sunset view across Lake Champlain: "There I beheld the orb of day go down gorgeously on a serene night . . . lingering reflections upon the floating clouds, the long streaks of light, the appearance of islands, all bathed with lustre, and the reluctant dying out of day in the west exceeded all which I had conceived of Italian skies."¹¹ In his oil sketch of Mount Mansfield Gifford achieved this effect, his diminutive figures held in rapt attention by the sun's glow, the gold and pale purple hills undulating softly in the hazy distance.

11. Anonymous, "Adventures on a Mountain-Top," *Knickerbocker* 55, no. 4 (April 1860): 363; quoted in Christopher Kent Wilson's entry on *Mount Mansfield* in National Gallery of Art, *American Paintings from the Manoogian Collection* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1989), 46.



FIG. 94 Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Mount Mansfield*, 1858. Oil on canvas, $30\frac{1}{2} \times 60\frac{1}{4}$ in. Manoogian Collection

As was the case in most of Gifford's Chief Pictures, the process of translating such a sunset into paint included a mixture of plein-air and studio work to establish the composition. From this first trip to the region Gifford painted at least nine oil sketches,¹² of which this particular sketch served as the model for the eventual Chief Picture (fig. 94). In scale and handling this sketch appears to be one of the artist's studio-painted intermediaries, part of the process of abstraction Gifford employed as one aspect of his technique. In addition to the pronounced modifications Gifford made to the contours of the landscape in enlarging the sketch to the finished painting, he also significantly reduced the scale of the figures, rendering the mountain escarpment even more impressive in scale. In the sketch, the figures with their long shadows survey the landscape from a vantage point not far from that of the artist; in the painting, Gifford has measurably increased the distance between the viewer and the figures. The transformation changes the entire scale of the mountain and in doing so magnifies the enormity of reaching the summit. In the easel painting the figures are "standing on the brink of a chasm . . . gazing down into a deep abyss,"¹³ a sensation far removed from the more intimate feel found in the sketch, in which a group of hikers contemplates the sunset.

12. Listed in Gifford's memorial catalogue as nos. 131–39.

13. "Exhibition at the Academy of Design," *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, 17 May 1859, 2; quoted in Ila Weiss, "Reflections on Sanford Gifford's Art," in *Sanford R. Gifford* (New York: Alexander Gallery, 1986), 6.

Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 55

Lake Maggiore, 1859

Oil and pencil on canvas, $5\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$ in.

Signed lower right: *S R Gifford*

Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College,
Poughkeepsie, NY, gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.33

Gifford first sketched Lake Maggiore in August 1856, after descending the Bernese Alps via the Simplon Pass. After an arduous but exhilarating thirteen-hour, forty-nine-mile walk over the pass to Domodossola, Gifford rested the following day and took an overnight stagecoach to Baveno on the shores of the lake. There he rowed to Isola Bella and Isola Madre, the small islands in the lake noted for their exotic plants and fine buildings. During the few days Gifford spent at Maggiore, he twice climbed Monterone, the single large peak rising above the lake, reveling in the panoramic view of the region from the summit. Gifford concluded, "the Baveno end of Maggiore where the Alps of the Simplon make the back ground are the only fine parts of this lake."¹⁴ It is this prospect Gifford recorded in his oil sketch and later paintings. He painted his first dated oil sketch on 19 August 1856, *Isola dei Pescatori, Lago Maggiore* (unlocated),¹⁵ from which he painted his first large-scale painting of the lake (unlocated), exhibited at the NAD in 1858.¹⁶

Maggiore proved to be a popular subject with Gifford's patrons. The artist's handling of the light and atmosphere of the mountainous setting creates a radiant, shimmering effect. His lush wet-on-wet surface allows him to sculpt forms in loose strokes of paint, maintaining the aerial delicacy of the scene. Faint pencil lines are still visible beneath the tones of the sky, while the sky itself dissolves into pure light. The artist painted two after-the-fact oil sketches in 1859 and sold one to Charles Congdon, and this one to Magoon.¹⁷

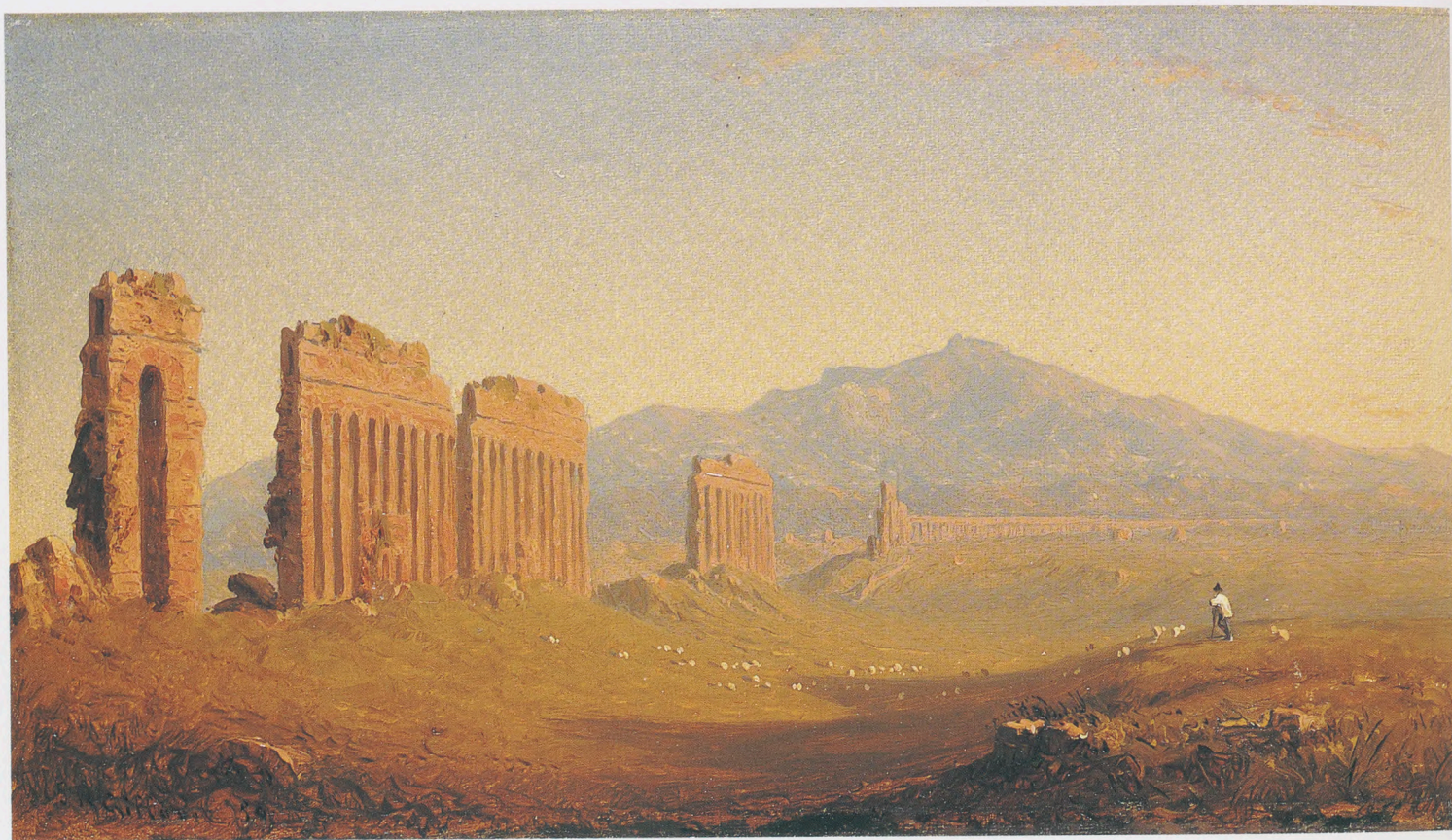
14. Gifford's journal, entry for 23 August, in his letter dated 29 August 1856.

15. Listed in Gifford's memorial catalogue, 17, no. 95.

16. Listed in Gifford's memorial catalogue, 19, no. 127.

17. Congdon's sketch was listed in the memorial catalogue as no. 165, while Vassar's was no. 170; Gifford's memorial catalogue, 20.





Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 56

The Roman Campagna, 1859

Oil and pencil on canvas, $5\frac{7}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$ in.

Signed and dated lower left: *S R Gifford '59*

Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College,

Poughkeepsie, NY, gift of Matthew Vassar, 1864.1.34

The Reverend Magoon began his correspondence with Gifford the same year he acquired all four of the small paintings by this artist in his collection, including *The Roman Campagna* and *Lake Maggiore* (cat. 55). Although Magoon usually expressed a preference for American scenery, he and Gifford were able to agree on four European scenes based on sketches made during the artist's first trip to Europe in 1855–57. All four of the works Magoon bought are dated 1859, suggesting that he chose his subjects from the plein-air sketches in the artist's studio and had Gifford paint the versions he purchased. If Gifford painted them to order, he would have pulled out his pencil and oil sketches made during his travels for reference as he worked. Given the artist's lifelong interest in religion and spirituality, he and Magoon would have found plenty to discuss as Magoon selected the subjects of the sketches.

Gifford's first mention of the aqueducts is on 26 April 1857. After receiving a letter informing him of the death of his sister Cornelia, he went for a walk on the Campagna.¹⁸ Previously Gifford had noted both the Romans' proclivity toward burying their dead near public roads and the number and grandeur of the tombs lining the Appian Way, the main road into Rome. One wonders, given Gifford's temperament, if he sought out this area for personal, contemplative reasons. In 1866, reflecting on his past travels, Gifford recalled the "lonely and lovely Campagna,"¹⁹ echoing a sentiment familiar to American artists confronted with the vast expanses of fallow ground.

Gifford did not sketch extensively on the Campagna, and of his oil sketches this is the only one whose current location is known. Magoon's sketch was painted after the artist completed and exhibited one of the larger, more finished versions of the subject at the NAD in 1858 (unlocated). This small sketch of the Claudian aqueducts owes much to Cole's *Aqueduct near Rome* painted in 1832 (see fig. 59), which influenced any number of other American artists who attempted the view.²⁰ Gifford's sketch presents the bowl-like depression at the base of the arches as a sunlit pasture for grazing sheep; his bucolic view of the site enhances the sense of decay and renewal vested in the interpretation of classical ruins.

18. Gifford's journal, entry for 26 April, in his letter dated 2 May 1857.

19. Gifford's journal, letter to Candace Wheeler, Hudson, N.Y., 28 July 1866.

20. This subject and Cole's painting are discussed at length in the author's entry on *Aqueduct near Rome*, in Stebbins et al., *The Lure of Italy*, 260–61.

Sanford
Robinson
Gifford

CAT. 57

*Mist Rising at Sunset in
the Catskills*, ca. 1861

Oil and pencil on canvas,
6¾ × 9½ in.

The Art Institute of
Chicago, Gift of Jamee J. and
Marshall Field, 1988.217



21. McEntee recalled, "Through some misunderstanding we each supposed we had hired the studio . . . which he occupied at the time of his death. It was left to the decision of the janitor, and the room was assigned to me. I saw that he was greatly disappointed, and after thinking the matter over carefully, I waived my claim and handed the studio over to him. We soon became friends, and in a little time intimate friends, passing much of the summers together and daily enjoying each other's society during the winter in the city." McEntee address, *Century Association, Gifford Memorial Meeting of the Century, Friday Evening, November 19th, 1880* (New York: The Century Association; reprint, New York: Olana Gallery, 1974), 49.

22. McEntee's diary, entry for Monday, 20 August 1877. AAA, reel D180.

23. Dated sketches in Gifford's sketchbook from 1860–63 provide his itinerary for this trip with McEntee and Whittredge. These sketchbooks are recorded on microfilm in the AAA, reel 688. See also Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford Robinson Gifford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 93.

24. These two works are no. 191, *A Mist Rising in the Catskills*, and no. 192, *A Sketch of Mist Rising*; see Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 90.

Gifford and Jervis McEntee were lifelong friends, having met when they both tried to rent the same studio in the newly opened Tenth Street Studio Building.²¹ Gifford won that particular point, and in a way it defined the two artists' relationship. McEntee genuinely enjoyed Gifford's company but fretted in letters and his diary that his friend's independence made it difficult for McEntee to keep up with him. The two men traveled together in the Catskills often, and in 1861, accompanied by fellow artists Worthington Whittredge and John White, made a tour of Lake Mohonk. As McEntee later recalled, "I had not been there since 1861 I think when Gifford[,] Whittredge, John White and I staid [*sic*] there over night on a walking trip from Bracketts. Now there is a large house there and walks in all directions and people every where in what used to be one of the wildest places I ever knew."²² If McEntee's memory is accurate, this pair of oil sketches may have been painted following the evening of 15 September 1861, as McEntee and Gifford camped there overnight.²³ As one might expect, the scenes are not identical, reflective of the men's individual reactions to phases of the sunset, nor is there any certainty that either or both sketches were painted *en plein air*.

The differences between the two men's works may be ascribed to that of temperament. Gifford's diminutive sketch is one of two similarly titled oil sketches listed in his memorial catalogue,²⁴ raising the possibility that this well-composed scene on canvas was created after a plein-air version, currently unlocated. Here Gifford has not only painted the spectacular sunset effects but also included a pair of appreciative men pulling their boat ashore as the light fades. Whether they in some way commemorate the two artists or simply presented Gifford with a convenient visual anchor for the painting cannot be determined. Certainly Gifford and McEntee would paint themselves and each other in oil sketches done of Mount Desert (see cat. 60) and chose to paint companion sketches on various travels at home and abroad (see cat. 61).

McEntee's sketch, painted on a larger piece of panel, is a more cumbersome plein-air support but not any larger than the canvases painted outdoors by Durand and Kensett. The flat-topped hill on the far right is Humpty-Dumpty, a distinctive natural landmark

Jervis McEntee

CAT. 58

Mist Rising near New Paltz, ca. 1861

Oil on panel, 17¹¹/₁₆ × 23³/₄ in.

D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc., New York



not far from New Paltz, located in the eastern Catskills near Rondout (now Kingston), McEntee's lifelong home.²⁵ Part of the Shawangunk range, Humpty-Dumpty is near Mohonk Lake, site of the Mohonk Mountain House built in 1869. McEntee spent his summers sketching in the Catskills, returning to New York City to partake in the winter social activities among the studios. Typical of McEntee's penchant for delicately rendered, brooding overtones, he has placed the viewer on the valley floor close to the base of the ridge, rather than at the more distant, slightly elevated perspective that would have been preferred by Gifford. McEntee's picture provides the sense of being submerged in the landscape, surrounded by the rising hills as they succumb to evening's darkness. A small pool of standing water glistens with reflected rays of light. The wet-on-wet handling of the paint means the artist worked rapidly over the entire surface, and if the work was painted out-of-doors, in a race against the encroaching twilight.

25. My thanks to Katherine Baumgartner, of D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc., for providing the identification of the site in McEntee's sketch, and to Mrs. Deedee Wigmore for alerting me to the existence of Gifford's version of the scene.



Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 59

The Camp of the Seventh Regiment near Frederick, Maryland,
July 1863

Oil and pencil on canvas, 9½ × 15½ in.

Signed and dated lower left: *S R Gifford July 1863*

Inscribed verso: *Camp of the 7th Regiment New York National*
Guard near Frederick Maryland July 1863, by S. R. Gifford

Private collection

Gifford enlisted in the Seventh Regiment of the New York National Guard on 30 April 1861.²⁶ Stationed outside Washington, D.C., the Seventh saw little action during the Civil War, because its primary role was to deter uprisings in the annexed portions of northern Virginia and Maryland closest to the city of Washington.²⁷ Gifford served with the regiment only during the summer months from 1861 to 1863 and filled several sketchbooks with figure studies of the men, both black and white, attached to his regiment. Most of his work presents the tedium of camp life, figure studies of idling or dozing soldiers and servants, or sketches of tents and equipment. Like Winslow Homer, he found the lengthy stretches of inactivity frustrating for a man accustomed to constant travel and exposure to new sights.²⁸ Still, Gifford enlivened his letters to family and friends with anecdotes as he lamented the lack of opportunity to paint.²⁹

26. William Swinton, *History of the Seventh Regiment National Guard during the War of Rebellion* (New York: Fields, Osgood Co., 1870), 155; cited in Ila Weiss, *Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823–1880)* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 206 n. 1.

In a battle spanning the first three days of July, General Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army was decisively beaten at Gettysburg, which even then must have appeared to have been the turning point in the war. Gifford's regiment was mustered from its position outside Baltimore to Frederick City, an important strategic outpost. Their orders were to harass and, if possible, stop Lee's retreating troops from crossing the Potomac back into Virginia. As General George Meade's Union troops gave chase, the Seventh remained behind to guard Frederick City. Gifford's oil sketch, dated simply *July 1863*, conveys the renewed optimism in the air following the battle: the sunlight appears to take an active role in lifting and dispersing the clouds as the troops bask in its warm glow. In a letter written to his father, Gifford might well have been bringing into focus his ideas for this sketch, and ultimately for the large canvas to which it relates:

We came here from Monocacy on the 7th, marching up in the rain. We came into this field (when Hooker was relieved by Meade) in the rain and bivouacked in the mud. It did not take long to strip the neighboring fences of their remaining rails, and thatch them with sheaves of wheat from the next field. It seemed a pity to waste such rich grain, but after all it was not wasted, for it made very comfortable beds and pretty good thatches. . . . Our men, viz. Adams, formerly of Hudson, Heiser and myself got ourselves up a very secure shelter with a five-barred gate, some wheat sheaves, and some rails. The next afternoon it cleared and the ground is now fast drying up.³⁰

Gifford's oil sketch of the Seventh Regiment bivouac focuses, not on the discomfort endured in "Camp Misery" (so named for its seemingly perpetual wetness), but on the changes in both the weather and the soldiers' mood. As guardsmen patrol the perimeter of the camp, the other soldiers relax, chatting with comrades and servants, their clothing drying on the makeshift tents. The flag of the United States occupies a prominent spot to the right of center, a small but telling reminder of the Union cause. As with many of the artist's oil sketches, the sparkle and lively surface of the sketch belie the time and effort put into its making, undoubtedly after Gifford had returned from his tour of duty.

During the next year Gifford painted his large-scale version of this scene, now in the collection of the Seventh Regiment Armory in New York. Gifford, like most of his landscape painting colleagues, handled figures best on a very small scale; in this regard his Civil War paintings represent a stretch of his ability. His intermediate oil sketches were in some respects more successful, as his handling of the miniaturized troops is much more confident, his characteristic lively brushwork capable of conveying impressive detail. In this small work Gifford put more effort, and extracted more specific detail, than in most if not all of his oil sketches, indicative perhaps of the artist's heightened awareness of the significance of the moment. That the artist sold this sketch in 1867 to A. D. Gridley of Clinton, New York, may be considered an additional measure of its success.³¹

27. In a letter from Baltimore written 27 July 1862, Gifford explained: "This inaction is very tiresome. I think the Regiment would jump at the chance of an encounter with the enemy. Anything to break the monotonous routine of our life. There is no doubt, however, that some good regiments are here an essential to the safety of the City." Gifford to Tom and Candace Wheeler. Gifford papers, typescript courtesy of Dr. Sanford Gifford.

28. Gifford's letters to his father and other family members that he wrote each of the three summers he spent with the Seventh Regiment give a sense of the tedium Gifford endured as part of the relatively idle protective force around Arlington Heights, Virginia, and Frederick, Maryland.

29. "Do not think I chafe under this military subjection—I don't and with reservations, I like it. . . . but I think often of my friends at home, of their quiet and peaceful lives, of my studio—of the green fields, and the grand mountains, where but for these unhappy times, I would be now sitting on a camp stool under a peaceful umbrella, instead of sitting, as I am now, in a corner of this noisy guard house." Gifford to Tom and Candace Wheeler, 2 July 1862. Gifford papers, typescript courtesy of Dr. Sanford Gifford.

30. Gifford to his father, Elihu Gifford, "In camp near Frederick, Md. July 9th, 1863." Gifford papers, typescript courtesy of Dr. Sanford Gifford.

31. Listed in Gifford's memorial catalogue, 33, no. 452.



Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 60

The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine, 1864–65

Oil on canvas, 11 × 19 in.

Signed and dated lower right: *S R Gifford / 1865 /*

(faintly incised) *Mt. ———, / July 22, 1864*

Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.

Sanford Gifford sketched from the summit of Green Mountain (now Cadillac Mountain) on Mount Desert Island, Maine, in July 1864 and again in 1865.³² Drawing extensively in pencil on both trips, he used two bound sketchbooks for his vignettes.³³ Gifford also sketched in oils, evident both from the known whereabouts of one oil sketch dated July 1864 (fig. 95), and a gloss Gifford wrote on a two-page pencil sketch dated 15 July 1864, on which he noted, “near rocks of foreground not so black as in oil study.”³⁴ Gifford painted a suite of oil sketches from this trip, listed in the memorial catalogue, plus a pair of small works dated 1865, presumably including *The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine*. Ila Weiss has suggested that one of Gifford’s plein-air oil sketches may have inspired the artist to place a “sketch within a sketch,” as seen in the finished sketch under discussion. Regardless of the impetus behind his decision to place himself at work in his own sketch, Gifford’s meditation on plein-air painting ultimately owes its charm to the shared intimacy between artist and viewer: we are invited to watch the act of creativity and thereby are complicit in the making of a work of art.

The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine owes a debt to Thomas Cole’s *Oxbow*, in which the artist is depicted at work in one medium while his camp stool and umbrella mark the site of an earlier burst of creativity (see fig. 5). Here Gifford has already completed his oil sketch, which is visible pinned to the interior of the lid of his sketch box. His palette and brushes are still wet with the day’s paint, implying the recent comple-

32. Ila Weiss has identified the site depicted in this oil sketch as Otter Cove from the summit of present-day Cadillac Mountain; she relates it to a pencil sketch in a sketchbook recorded on microfilm in the AAA, reel 688, frame 403, titled “Green Mountain, Mt. Desert Island” dated 15 July 1864; Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 245–46.

33. These two sketchbooks are on microfilm in the AAA, reel 688.

34. Gifford sketchbook, 1863–65, inscribed *S R Gifford 15 10th St New York 1864*, 70 pp., 5½ × 8¼ in., AAA, reel 688; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 246.

tion of the painted sketch. Gifford's newly painted sketch adopts the same perspective as that of the viewer, rather than the vantage point assumed by the location of the abandoned camp stool. In other words, a literal reading of the sketch inside the sketch box would place the artist where the viewer is standing, enhancing the viewer's implicit participation in the making of the scene.

In fact there was an observer and a recorder of Gifford's artistic mission in 1864. Jervis McEntee accompanied Gifford to Mount Desert that summer, as evinced by an oil sketch in which he painted his fellow artist seated atop an outcrop of exposed bedrock overlooking the ocean (fig. 96). McEntee's sketch is dated *July 17, 1864*, and inscribed *Mt. Desert*, placing the two men there together; moreover, the figure in McEntee's oil sketch has Gifford's build and wears a hat resembling the one Gifford wears in his own oil sketch. McEntee and Gifford sketched together often, painting similar subjects (see cats. 57, 58, 61). In this case, the two men's oil sketches commemorate their trip to Maine and provide evidence of their plein-air production.



FIG. 95 Sanford Robinson Gifford, *A Sketch at Mount Desert, Maine*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 7 × 12 in. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Museum Purchase Fund, 72.1.7



FIG. 96 Jervis McEntee, *Mt. Desert, Maine*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 10½ × 16 in. Private collection



Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 61

Cardinal's Coach on the Campagna, October 1868

Oil and pencil on canvas laid down on panel,

3½ × 7¼ in.

Mr. and Mrs. Holcombe T. Green, Jr.

On his second trip to Europe during 1868–69, Gifford shared rooms in Rome with his sister Mary and the McEntees, Jervis and his wife, Gertrude. In early October 1868 Gifford convinced McEntee to join him for a weeklong sketching trip along the Appian Way into the Campagna. On 10 October the two men set out for Tivoli. On the final leg of their return, he and McEntee

saw a “stunning” piece of color. It was near sunset. A Cardinal’s carriage (black, red and gold) stopped on a little rise of the road, bringing carriage and figures in strong relief against the warm grey of the Alban Hills. A scarlet cardinal descended from the carriage. A Carthusian monk in black and white, and two lackeys in purple, gold and white, stood bowing. Horses black, with trappings of scarlet and gold. Imagine this color and light and dark relieved on a grey ground and illuminated by the richest horizontal light of sunset.

The following day Gifford’s brief entry reads, “21. Rain. Made an oil sketch of Arch of Nero—also a note of the sunset on a cardinal.”³⁵ Since there are no known preparatory drawings or oil sketches predating this small gem, it appears that this oil sketch is the “note” to which Gifford refers.³⁶

McEntee was equally taken by their chance meeting with the cardinal’s coach. His own oil sketch of the scene (fig. 97) contains the same set of elements as Gifford’s, but the two men painted very different pictures. In Gifford’s oil sketch the coach is stopped

35. Gifford’s journal, entries for 20 and 21 October, in his letter dated 2 November 1868.

36. Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 271.



FIG. 97 Jervis McEntee,
*A Journey's Pause in the
Roman Campagna*, ca. 1868.
Oil on canvas, 7 × 12 in.
Private collection

so that the cardinal and monk may walk ahead, the monk maintaining a short distance behind the prelate. The two lackeys stand at attention next to the coach, their hats on, while in the background the Alban Hills tower over coach and driver. McEntee adopted a view from the rear of the coach, which has stopped along the crest of the road, breaking the line of hills in the distance. Here the two attendants have removed their hats and stand in idle conversation, while the bareheaded monk, in his voluminous white robes, inclines his head toward the shorter cardinal. Both men paint the view to the south, and in each sketch the setting sun casts long shadows across the road in the same direction. However, unless the coach turned around on the road, one of the artists has taken liberties with the orientation of the scene to keep it framed by the distant hills. Neither artist makes mention of having seen the other's sketch, although given the closeness of these two friends it seems likely they would have compared notes. The artistic camaraderie that prompted both men to paint small sketches of this experience is one of the most pleasurable aspects of the oil sketch, as it illuminates a corner of the artists' lives and friendships.

Although Gifford's oil sketch remained in his estate, McEntee noted with satisfaction in 1873 that "Mr. Johnson a jeweler, with whom Eastman Johnson has exchanged a picture, called on me and staid [*sic*] a long time as it was a rainy day. I sold him my little picture of a Cardinal on the Campagna for \$100 which I am to take in trade from his establishment."³⁷

37. McEntee's diary, entry for Tuesday, 15 April 1873. AAA, reel D180; quoted in Garnett McCoy, ed., "Jervis McEntee's Diary," *Archives of American Art Journal* 8, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1968): 17 n. 134. McCoy identifies Mr. Johnson as "Probably S. Fisher Johnson, a New York collector of the 1860s and 1870s."



Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 62

Valley of the Chug Water, 1870

Oil and pencil on canvas,

8¼ × 13⅝ in.

Inscribed and dated lower left: *Valley of the Chug Water*

Wyoming Terr Aug 9th 1870

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

During the summer of 1870 Gifford, Whittredge, and Kensett traveled together to Colorado. It was Gifford's first trip west, and although he never painted a major picture based on his field sketches, he seemed captivated by the landscape. Soon after arriving in Colorado, Gifford abandoned his companions to accompany Colonel Ferdinand V. Hayden and the photographer William Henry Jackson on a trip into southeastern Wyoming. Whittredge did not take well to Gifford's departure, noting in his autobiography:

When he accompanied Kensett and myself to the Rocky Mountains he started fully equipped for work, but when he arrived there, where distances were deceptive, he became easy prey to Col. Hayden, who offered him a horse. He left us and his sketch box in cold blood in the midst of inspiring scenery. We neither saw nor heard from him for several months, until one rainy day on the plains we met him travelling alone in the fog towards our ranch by the aid of his compass. He had done literally nothing in the way of work during a whole summer spent in a picturesque region.³⁸

Whittredge may have felt jilted by Gifford's sudden disappearance with Hayden and Jackson, but Gifford certainly packed along his sketch box and paints, as his oil sketch *Valley of the Chug Water* attests.

On 7 August Hayden recorded, "With Mr. Gifford and four or five assistants I followed the valley of Lodge Pole Creek to the foot of the mountains, about sixteen miles

38. Worthington Whittredge, "The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge, 1820–1910," ed. John I. H. Baur, *Brooklyn Museum Journal* 1 (1942): 60.



William Henry Jackson

CAT. 63

Surveyors at Work, 8 August 1870

Photograph on paper,
8 × 10 in.

The Denver Public Library,
Western History Collection

distant.”³⁹ The following day while Gifford sketched the castellated hills near Chugwater Creek, Jackson took his photograph (cat. 63), providing a memento of the friendship developing between artist and photographer. It seems apparent that Gifford and Jackson admired each other greatly and enjoyed each other’s company. Jackson was a novice at landscape photography, and Gifford’s role, like Thomas Moran’s later, was to help him with both the choice of scenery and assistance with the actual photographic process.⁴⁰ Jackson returned the favor, photographing Gifford both as part of the group and individually on horseback, from which Gifford made a sketch in oils (private collection). According to Hayden, “During the day Mr. Jackson, with the assistance of the fine artistic taste of Mr. Gifford, secured some of the most beautiful photographic views which will prove of great value to the artist as well as the geologist.”⁴¹ He concluded by stating, “Mr. Gifford, although accompanying the party by invitation for the purpose of studying the grand scenery of the Rocky Mountains in an artistic sense, rendered us most efficient aid, and by his genial nature endeared himself to all.”⁴² Hayden may also have been justifying his decision to allow Gifford to travel with the survey; since he made the decision in the field, it was not authorized in advance by the Secretary of the Interior.

Gifford did return to his eastern colleagues, parting from Hayden’s group at Fort Bridger, Wyoming, on 15 September, presumably laden with his oil sketches. At no other point in Gifford’s career did he appear to paint all of his sketches out-of-doors, and possibly on site. The rapid pace of the group (Hayden was known by the Indians as “the man who picks up stones running”⁴³) and Gifford’s willingness to assist Jackson with his more cumbersome photography equipment would have forced the painter to work quickly. The daily dates on the sketches also suggest their immediacy of execution and completion and provide a complementary chronicle to Hayden’s official notes of their itinerary. That Gifford did not sign these sketches perhaps indicates their more personal nature, as opposed to candidates for public sale.

39. F. V. Hayden, *Preliminary Report of the United States Geological Survey of Wyoming and Portions of Contiguous Territories (Being a Second Annual Report of Progress) Conducted under the Authority of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871); quoted in Nancy Dustin Wall Moure, “Five Eastern Artists Out West,” *American Art Journal* (November 1973): 22.

40. On 9 August Jackson discovered that he left his lens cap at the Chugwater site. Gifford volunteered to ride with him the five miles back to recover it. William Henry Jackson, *The Pioneer Photographer* (Yonkers on Hudson: World Book Co., 1929), 81; quoted in Moure, “Five Eastern Artists Out West,” 23.

41. Hayden, *Preliminary Report*, 37; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 132.

42. Hayden, *Preliminary Report*, 5; quoted in Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 133.

43. Moure, “Five Eastern Artists Out West,” 22.



Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 64

Long's Peak, Colorado, 1870

Oil and pencil on canvas, $6\frac{1}{4} \times 13\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Inscribed and dated lower right: *Long's Peak Col. Sept 20th '70*

Collection of Arthur J. Phelan

After rejoining Whittredge and Kensett, Gifford continued to sketch *en plein air*, taking as his subject, as they did, the front range of the Rockies. Gifford seemed mesmerized by the Rockies, his sketches conveying the character and colors he had ascribed to the Apennines two years earlier: "There is nothing more exquisite in nature than a range of snow mts. seen in a fine day from a distance of 20 or 30 miles. They look as if made of pearls and opals—so soft, so exquisite, so negative and so lovely are the tones of color."⁴⁴ Gifford's oil sketch of Long's Peak, Colorado (cat. 64), conveys that opalescent shimmering atmosphere that sets his work apart from that of either of his companions. The restricted palette that renders muted gold grasses and subtle blue-gray mountains and sky captures the illimitable distances suggested by the clear air and low humidity. For this sketch he adopted a decidedly horizontal format more in keeping with Whittredge's plein-air sketches (see cat. 90), thereby accentuating the vastness of the landscape.

Kensett's oil sketches of the West might well have resulted in more than one major canvas of the region had the artist not died suddenly less than two years later.⁴⁵ His studio inventory yielded at least forty-two Colorado studies, among them *On the St. Vrain, Colorado Territory*.⁴⁶ Like Gifford, Kensett adopted a muted palette for the dry late

44. Gifford's journal, entry for 13 October, in his letter dated 2 November 1868.

45. *Valley of Valmont, Colorado* (unlocated) is listed as 30×44 in., no. 283 in the executor's sale, 21.

46. This sketch was listed in the executor's sale as no. 599, *On the St. Vrain, Colorado Territory*, $9\frac{1}{2} \times 13\frac{3}{4}$ in.; the discrepancy in size may be due to the intermittent use of sight sizes of paintings in the catalogue. It sold to a Mr. Randolph for \$150. "The Kensett Art Sale," *New York Daily Tribune*, 24–30 March 1873.



John Frederick Kensett

CAT. 65

On the St. Vrain, Colorado Territory, 1870

Oil and pencil on canvas, 10³/₈ × 14¹/₄ in.

Collection of Arthur J. Phelan

summer landscape. He also took considerable effort to compose his sketches, seeking visually complex vistas. The mountains looming in the rear are the same ones Gifford sketched in *Long's Peak*, but Kensett's more square format creates a very different spatial relationship between rear and foreground. Rather than focusing on the resolute horizontality of the plains at the base of the Rockies, in this sketch Kensett concentrated on the flow of shallow water across the foreground, creating a latticework of tiny brushstrokes to convey the speed and animation of water diverted over the rocky creek bed.⁴⁷

47. The north, middle, and south branches of the St. Vrain Creek run east from the Rockies, joining together and flowing into the Platte River north of the split between the Platte and South Platte rivers. The north branch of the St. Vrain flows along the base of Long's Peak.

Sanford Robinson Gifford

CAT. 66

A Winter Walk, 1878

Oil and pencil on board, $12\frac{1}{4} \times 9\frac{5}{8}$ in.

Signed and dated lower left: *Xmas 1878 S R Gifford*

Private collection, courtesy of D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc.,
New York

The time Gifford spent with his family constituted some of the artist's most cherished moments, and throughout his career he painted small, intimate oil sketches commemorating family outings and events of personal significance. *A Winter Walk*, dated *Xmas 1878*, represents one such highly personal sketch.⁴⁸ Painted the year after his secret marriage to Mary Cecilia Canfield, this may be a vignette from their second Christmas together, or perhaps a remembrance of an equally cherished moment with a member of his family in Hudson, New York.

In this oil sketch Gifford has captured the opalescent tones reflected on the snow and in the sky at the close of a winter day. The light pencil lines he used to compose the scene are still visible through the thinly applied paint. Gifford's brushwork is characteristically lively, especially in the sky, where his brush danced back and forth, weaving in and out of delicate tree limbs to paint the sky and the trees simultaneously. The purple-gray tones and the pale, lemony sun suggest the weak light of a late afternoon. The wet-on-wet forms of trees shelter the two figures who walk silently through the wintry landscape, along the course of a stream. The fence over which the two figures are climbing divides the near and far distance.

A Winter Walk represents the intimate realm of the oil sketch. Like many of Church's late oil sketches from Olana, this work would have held a host of potent associations for Gifford that are lost to us as outsiders. The inclusive feeling of *The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine* (cat. 60) is here replaced by the privacy of a diary. Gifford's subtle palette and inward-looking subject augur the shift away from the grand style of landscape toward tonalism and its emphasis on suggestion and intimation. The viewer completes the meaning of the work by bringing to it equally personal associations, making the intrinsic qualities of the sketch a harbinger of the relationship between painting and viewer in the not-so-distant future of abstraction.

48. This work is probably no. 699 in the memorial catalogue, called *A Winter Scene*, $12\frac{1}{2} \times 10$ in., Gifford sale, lot 143, 45, sold for \$275 to Mr. Wilkinson. Recorded in an unidentified newspaper clipping. Sanford R. Gifford vertical file, Library, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.





Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 67

Scene in the Tyrol, 1854

Oil on fiberboard, 9½ × 13 in.

Signed and dated lower right: AB 1854

Inscribed on the verso: *Scene in the Tyrol / Mr. B. P. Shillaber,
with the / Compliments of A. Bierstadt.*

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian
Institution, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966



FIG. 98 Albert Bierstadt, *The Bernese Alps*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 42 × 72 in. Private collection

Painted during Bierstadt's first summer afield, *Scene in the Tyrol* is a small, rapidly brushed vignette of the Alpine countryside. Carefully composed yet swiftly executed, this oil sketch was designed to record the landscape under the variable weather Bierstadt encountered, with an eye toward picturesque outcrops and meadows. Its extensive wet-on-wet execution is typical of the plein-air work Bierstadt carried out on this diminutive scale.¹ The small size and informally painted surface suggest that this was a scene he painted quickly, before the light changed, and the sense of rapidly changing light is precisely what Bierstadt captured so effectively in this sketch. The sketch has a completeness to its resolution of form and space that is belied by the rapidity with which it was executed, especially when compared with the artist's more finished studies, such as *Rocca di Secca* (cat. 70).

Such small sketches as *Scene in the Tyrol* became Bierstadt's favored gift to friends. The artist frequently selected well-composed vignettes as tokens with which he could afford to part. After his return to America, he presented this sketch to a friend of his in Boston, B. P. Shillaber.² Bierstadt had a predilection for mountainous landscapes, often choosing as his vantage point an elevated, sloping foreground with a deep view across a glaciated plain to a distant range of mountains. Bierstadt adapted this scene for *The Bernese Alps* painted in 1859 (fig. 98). He would return to this composition in his paintings of the American West, notably *On the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate* (cat. 75).

1. Several candidates for sketches painted in Germany and Switzerland include *Mountain Lake* and *Mountain Landscape* (Sotheby's, New York, sale of 3 December 1987), in which the height of the peaks and flatness of the foreground valley suggest Alpine orogeny. *Landscape with Snow-capped Mountains* (Sotheby's, New York, sale of 25 September 1991) is another Alpine view of this type, and *Mountain House* (Sotheby's, New York, sale of 31 January–3 February 1979) could be among the works Bierstadt painted during his summer sojourn recorded by Whittredge (see chap. 2, 53–54).

2. Shillaber wrote under the pseudonym Mrs. Partington; the two men must have met while the artist was living in Boston prior to his departure for Europe. See the Partington/Shillaber obituary in the *New York Times*, 26 November 1890, sec. 1, p. 6. Copy in the curatorial files, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 68

Olevano, 1857

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Signed lower right: *ABierstadt*

Inscribed along the bottom: *Volatre Olivano Roco*

San Stefano Kapranika

The Saint Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan

Fund, 150:1953



FIG. 99 Albert Bierstadt, *Italian Costume Studies*, 1856–57. Oil on paper, 11½ × 18 in. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, Connecticut, USA, 1948.9

Olevano is one of Bierstadt's finest and most ambitious plein-air oil sketches. The tack holes, still evident in the corners of the sheet, indicate that the paper was fitted into the lid of a large sketch box or attached to a solid support while the artist worked. The area around *Olevano* was a site popular with the Nazarenes, a group of German artists living in Rome who had established the Düsseldorf Academy, and with members of the German Artists' club in Rome.³ Built against a steep hillside high above Subiaco and Cervara, *Olevano* presented a congenial subject for an artist fresh from the German Alps. Bierstadt's sketch of *Olevano* adopts a viewpoint looking down and across the hillside, the town nestled among the surrounding outcrops. The artist devoted considerable time and effort to painting the architecture and the repoussoir foreground tree, presumably thinking as he worked of the scene as one suitable for later amplification in a painting. He also marked reference points along the bottom margin, naming both the site and the surrounding landmarks and nearby towns.⁴

Appearing as an increasingly visible pentimento in the right foreground is a woman dressed in red and white, where Bierstadt experimented with a figure adapted from his costume studies (fig. 99). Her form is distinct, indicating she was painted after the background landscape had dried; however, Bierstadt clearly changed his mind and painted her out at some later point. The finished painting *Olevano* (fig. 100) reinstates this figure as part of a group of peasants relaxing in the foreground. Bierstadt incorporated this figure of a woman in several of the easel paintings he finished after returning to the United States, notable among them the *Arch of Octavius (Roman Fish Market)*, 1858 (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), and *Olevano*, painted two years later. The close similarity between the female figures in Bierstadt's easel paintings and those in his studies

3. In May 1857 Bierstadt and Sanford Robinson Gifford paid visits to two of the most venerable and influential German Nazarene painters, Friedrich Overbeck and Peter von Cornelius, both of whom lived in Rome; the Americans also socialized with the German Artists' club there, participating in festivals and evenings and undoubtedly picking up suggestions of suitable sketching sites. Gifford's journal, entry for 4 April, in his letter dated 22 May 1857. Gifford kept a daily journal on each of his European trips that he then sent to his father as a series of letters. A transcript of these letters is in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA), reel D21.

4. The inscriptions are phonetic spellings of Velletri, 17 miles southwest of Olevano, Rocca San Stefano, 4 miles north, and Capranica Prenestina, 4 miles east of Olevano. See Diana Strazdes's entry for *Olevano* in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., et al., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760–1914* (New York: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 302, 304.



FIG. 100 Albert Bierstadt, *Olevano*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 30 × 48 in. Butler-McCook Collection, Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, Hartford, Connecticut, 1981.6.435

provides early examples of the efficiency with which he employed his oil sketches as he established the parameters of his visual vocabulary.

Such costume studies reflected the general interest visiting artists had in placing brightly dressed women in their paintings of Italy. In April Bierstadt and Gifford had attended the Cervara artists' festa, for which over two hundred artists dressed in costume for the grand parade.⁵ Bierstadt took the opportunity to paint two small oil sketches of local women in their native dress, both inscribed *Chavara*, a phonetic misspelling of the festa town.⁶ In one Bierstadt initially painted a priest in the robes of his order, inscribed *San Carlino* (fig. 101), and ended up painting a second figure of a woman carrying a water jar on her head, superimposed atop the priest.⁷ Perhaps Bierstadt was down to his last sheet of paper and realized he could not paint both the woman's figure and the jar without using the entire length of the sheet. Painting on the verso of an unprimed sheet of paper would not have worked, as the oils tended to soak through the fiber relatively quickly.⁸ Bierstadt's oil sketch *Olevano*, by contrast, is painted on primed paper, the detailed treatment of landscape, architecture, and figures indicative of the care with which the artist worked during the lengthy stints required for such a large sketch, whether painted entirely *en plein air* or completed in the artist's studio.



FIG. 101 Albert Bierstadt, *Italian Costume Sketches of Two Figures*, ca. 1857. Oil on paper mounted on board, $11\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ in. Elliott Galleries, New York

5. Gifford's journal, letter dated 22 May 1857.

6. These two oil sketches were first published in Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990), 134, cats. 9, 10.

7. According to Gifford, "The women [of Cervara] carry water on their heads in copper vases of an elegant shape. All their burdens, even the lightest

things, are carried on the head, and this habit gives every woman a fine, noble bearing." Gifford's journal, entry for 13 October, in his letter dated 15 October 1856. Gifford mentions sketching the festa dresses of the women there, along with fellow artist Hamilton Wilde.

8. It is also possible that these two oil sketches were painted during figure drawing classes Bierstadt may have attended with Gifford over the winter of 1856–57. See cat. 18 n. 8.

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 69

Fishing Boats at Capri, 1857

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 13½ × 19½ in.

Signed and dated lower right: *Capri / June 14, 1857 /*

ABierstadt

Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Martha C. Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865, 47.1264

9. "Bierstadt finds it will cost \$20 or \$30 and an infinite deal of trouble to get his trunk out of the custom house. . . . Bierstadt determined to disappoint them by not taking the trunk out—sending it to England instead. . . . Our sketch boxes and a couple of guide books of mine we could not get then. The boxes were to be re-examined and duties paid on every half used tube of color and every stump of a brush. The books were contraband (!) (Germany and Venice), and could not be got out at all. In any civilized country the trunk would have been passed at once. . . . 25th. Spent the morning at the custom house and succeeded in getting our sketch boxes and my guide books. . . . The trunk was then sealed and sent on board the English steamer. To get our boxes and the two books cost us six days waiting and \$5." Gifford's journal, entry for 25 June 1857, in his letter of the same date.

10. Gifford's journal, entry for 6 May, in his letter dated 22 May 1857.

11. Gifford's journal, entry for 25 June 1857, in his letter of the same date.

In early May 1857 Bierstadt and Gifford argued with the local customs officials in Naples over duties levied on Bierstadt's trunk, which contained their sketching gear and guide-books.⁹ Six days later, after successfully liberating their art supplies, they set out on foot, their itinerary chosen to cover some of the more picturesque spots on their way to Capri.¹⁰ At Capri, Gifford and Bierstadt spent several weeks in June sketching the coast at Marina Piccola and Marina Grande, often working side by side. Bierstadt opted for oil sketches while Gifford made good use of his pencil and sketchbook, on one page sketching Bierstadt at work, with his sketch box on his knees (see fig. 1), and on the facing leaf capturing the artist standing atop a promontory, waving his hat in a stiff breeze.

The two artists sketched at Marina Piccola, focusing on the activity along the sheltered beach. Gifford noted, "The coast is fine from here. The groups of fishermen with their boats and nets on the little beach are very picturesque."¹¹ On 14 June, while Bierstadt painted *Fishing Boats at Capri*, Gifford sketched several vignettes of the same scene. On one page of his sketchbook Gifford focused on a donkey dozing on the beach (fig. 102) that also appears in the foreground of Bierstadt's oil sketch. The scale in Bierstadt's work fluctuates between individual figures and figural groups, the proportions of the rooster and donkey in the foreground being far larger than the idle groups of fishermen and -women mending nets on the beach. Bierstadt's interest in creating a visually coherent scene was often made subservient to his dedication to depict in some detail the individual elements making up the scene.



FIG. 102 Sanford Robinson Gifford, "Capri": *Two Sleeping Donkeys and a Man's Head in Profile*, 1857. Pencil on paper, 3⅞ × 5⅞ in. Private collection





Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 70

Rocca di Secca, 1858

Oil on academy board, 12½ × 18¾ in.

Signed and dated lower right: AB 1858

Inscribed verso: *Roca di Seca / St. Germania*

Alexander Gallery, New York

Bierstadt made many of his small finished oil sketches available for purchase, including *Rocca di Secca*, which was one of the artist's recollections of Italian scenery. Bierstadt and Gifford passed close to the present-day town of Roccasecca on their route between Rome and Naples. Of their trip Gifford wrote, "Bierstadt and I have determined to go through the Abruzzi to Naples. . . . B. and I will walk most of the way, making digressions among the mountains as the scenery etc. invite. We will shoulder our knapsacks, and expect to rough it through to N. in about a fortnight."¹² The two artists sketched in pencil on their walking tour, having sent their painting supplies ahead to Naples (see cat. 69).

Bierstadt painted this small finished sketch shortly after his return from Italy in 1858, perhaps in response to the acclaim for *Lake Lucerne* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) and to satisfy his new patrons. In addition to the picturesque charm of the setting, Bierstadt has paid particular attention to the soft glow of the Italian light on the various forms. The high resolution of the foreground and the artist's attention to small details are hallmarks of studio work, a practice Bierstadt maintained virtually his entire career.

In 1867, a year after John Delano purchased this small painting and presented it to his daughter and son-in-law, the couple traveled to the site, which they "recognized at once" from Bierstadt's sketch. Years later Alice Delano Weeks wrote a letter describing the historical associations of the site, noting among other distinguishing characteristics that it was the birthplace of St. Thomas Aquinas.¹³ For Bierstadt's patrons, that factor of authenticity would be a large part of the appeal of his works.

12. Gifford's journal, entry for 6 May, in his letter dated 11 May 1857.

13. The letter is taped to the verso of the painting: "Roca de Secca [*sic*]"—opposite Cairo from the plains of the River Garigliano where in the year 1411 a battle was fought resulting in the Victory of the Duke of Anjou and his Florintine [*sic*] allies, over Ladislaus King of Naples. The hill above the town of Rocca de Secca [*sic*] is crowned with a castle in ruins the Birth place of St. Thomas Aquinas and [illeg.] To the right in the extreme distance is Mt. Cusino, on the summit of which is the celebrated monastery founded by St. Benedict in 529. on the site of an ancient temple of Apollo. The scene is on the main road from Rome to Naples about halfway. Albert Bierstadt artist Picture presented by J. C. Delano to his son in law, John A. Weeks about 1866. In 1867, both of us travelled over this road to Naples, and recognized at once the spot. Alice D. Weeks 18[92?]; quoted in Hirschl & Adler, *Adventure and Inspiration* (New York: Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., 1988), 54, no. 32.

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 71

Surveyor's Wagon in the Rockies, ca. 1859

Oil on paper mounted on Masonite, $7\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{7}{8}$ in.

Signed lower right: ABierstadt

The Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of J. Lionberger Davis,

158:1953

For his first trip into the American West, Bierstadt accompanied Colonel Frederick V. Lander's survey. The need to move rapidly as part of an official entourage certainly contributed to the small scale and rapid execution of Bierstadt's plein-air oil sketches from this trip. In a letter Bierstadt mentioned making rapid progress toward this goal, using a "spring-wagon and six mules."¹⁴ One of Bierstadt's most appealing works records a similar vehicle, painted during one or more brief halts on the journey. *Surveyor's Wagon in the Rockies* is a tiny, lushly painted sketch of a mule-drawn wagon set against a stark yet lovely landscape. Bierstadt has painted four mules rather than the six mentioned in his letter, demonstrating that his concern is not with documenting the mode of transport. As he had in Europe, the artist concentrated on the space in his chosen vista. The hauntingly beautiful qualities of the prairie are here portrayed as vast, open expanses suffused in a lambent glow, terminating in the impressive scale of the mountains in the distance.

Despite the speed of the trip, Bierstadt clearly took his time with this small work, allowing the thinly painted landscape and sky to dry before adding the wagon and figures. He carefully rendered the light and shadow on the wagon's canvas; using a tiny brush he added minute touches of red to the wheels and dots of light on the harnesses. By contrast, the figures in the distance merge with the hazy contours of flatland and mountain ranges. The massive peaks appear to hover in the distance, conveying the vastness of the region. Not unlike his tiny sketches of European mountain scenery, this little gem captures a complete sense of the landscape, conveying far more than its size would suggest was possible.¹⁵

14. B. [Albert Bierstadt], letter from Rocky Mountains, 10 July 1859, *Crayon* 6, no. 9 (September 1859): 287.

15. A modern-day, large-scale copy of this tiny sketch, painted in 1985, graces the lobby of the Driskill Hotel in Austin, Texas. The copy measures 3 by 11 feet.





Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 72

Chimney Rock, 1859

Oil on paper, 4 × 9 in.

Autry Museum of Western
Heritage, Los Angeles

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 73

View of Chimney Rock, Ogallallah

Sioux Village in the Foreground

Oil on canvas, 13 × 19 in.

Colby College Museum of Art,
Gift of the Honorable Roderic
H. D. Henderson



Between 4 and 6 June 1859 Bierstadt and the Lander Survey were near the distinctive geological feature known as Chimney Rock. Bierstadt mentioned the landmark specifically in a letter published in the *New Bedford Mercury* on 7 July and painted two separate oil sketches of the isolated sedimentary spire. The diminutive size of *Chimney Rock* (cat. 72) and its lush surface identify it as a plein-air oil sketch. Characteristic of the artist's plein-air landscapes, it is swiftly executed with effort expended, not to emphasize the grandeur of the formation, but only to capture its outline. Bierstadt later painted a larger studio oil sketch, *View of Chimney Rock, Ogalallah Sioux Village in the Foreground* (cat. 73), a finished landscape study that served as a template for an engraving of the same name published in the *Ladies' Repository* of 1866 (fig. 103). Although Bierstadt composed the landscape, with its distant view to Chimney Rock, using his plein-air sketch as a guide, here the effect is much different: the space has been modified to make Chimney Rock the primary feature on the horizon, its shape echoed in the structure of the teepees. By 1866 Bierstadt had sold the studio sketch to W. G. Blackler of New Bedford, who provided the painting for the engraver to copy.¹⁶

As reported in the *New Bedford Mercury*, "Mr. Bierstadt has succeeded in sketching some fine studies including a picturesque groupe [*sic*] of Indians,—a traveling party, the horses with the tent poles fastened to their sides, one end dragging upon the ground, and seated upon the poles, a squaw and papoose, with blankets and other camp articles."¹⁷ This grouping appears in the foreground of the artist's large-scale painting *Indians Traveling near Fort Laramie* (fig. 104), a painting that incorporates Chimney Rock as a tiny feature on the distant horizon, its placement a key element in the composition. This painting was engraved for Ludlow's *Heart of the Continent* in 1870.¹⁸ The progression from plein-air oil sketch to studio-painted finished sketch, to an engraving, and finally to a large-scale easel painting is a familiar one in Bierstadt's oeuvre.

16. The inscription engraved along the bottom margin of the engraving reads: *Engraved expressly for the Ladies Repository by S. V. Hunt from a Painting by A. Bierstadt in the possession of W. G. Blackler, Esq. of New Bedford, Mass.*

17. *New Bedford Daily Mercury*, 13 June 1859; 18 June, according to Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 144.

18. Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent: A Record of Travel across the Plains and in Oregon, with an Examination of the American Principle* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), facing 195, therein titled *Indians on the Move*.

FIG. 103 Samuel Valentine Hunt, after Bierstadt, *Chimney Rock, Ogalallah Sioux Village in the Foreground*. From *Ladies' Repository* 26 (1866): frontispiece. The Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University



FIG. 104 Albert Bierstadt, *Indians Traveling near Fort Laramie*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 23 × 41 in. Private collection





Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 74

Nebraska [Territory]: Wasatch Mountains, 1859

Oil on paper mounted on board, 13 × 19 in.

Signed lower left: *ABierstadt*

Inscribed verso: *Nebraska, Wascatch Mountains*

Collection of Arthur J. Phelan

19. Wyoming entered the United States as a territory in 1869. Sarah Boehme provides a lucid discussion of the topography and its history in *Rendezvous to Roundup: The First One Hundred Years of Art in Wyoming* (Cody, Wyo.: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1990). On Frost, see Jourdan Houston, "Francis Seth Frost: Beyond Bierstadt's Shadow," *American Art Review* 6, no. 4 (August–September 1994): 146–57.

Bierstadt and fellow artist Francis Seth Frost accompanied Colonel Lander's survey as far as South Pass in what was then the Nebraska Territory.¹⁹ South Pass, which is in present-day Wyoming, represented the halfway point between the Mississippi River and the California coast, where the Oregon Trail crossed the Continental Divide. The survey party reached the pass on 24 June 1859 and spent the next two weeks exploring the region. On site, working primarily in oil, Bierstadt began mapping the features of the landscape. Ranging from broadly brushed sketches of the topography to more detailed studies of outcroppings of rocks and stands of trees, he painted a large number of oil sketches during that fortnight.



FIG. 105 Albert Bierstadt, *Among the Wind River Mountains*, 1859. Oil on paper mounted on board, $13\frac{1}{4} \times 19\frac{1}{16}$ in. Courtesy Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas, 31.14/2

The vista Bierstadt chose for his sketches and subsequent paintings looks west across the Big Sandy Valley toward the Salt River Mountains, with the Wind River Range to the north.²⁰ In two sketches Bierstadt painted the same foreground slope, preserving the muted late summer colors of dry grass and pale sky. *Nebraska [Territory]: Wasatch Mountains* explores the land itself, especially the drop between foreground and rear slope, with a view to the distance, creating a diagonal thrust also apparent in the finished pictures the artist painted of this site (see fig. 26). Among the strongest of Bierstadt's western sketches, this work captures the subtleties of western light and the expansiveness of the landscape without relying on an overly detailed, topographic rendering. A related sketch titled *Among the Wind River Mountains* (fig. 105) is even more suggestive, the broad strokes of thin paint articulating the contours of the sere landscape.²¹ Flyspecks and a fingerprint in the wet paint are reminders of the vicissitudes of plein-air painting. In both of these sketches the near foreground is a thin wash of paint drawn back and forth across the paper's surface as a kind of shorthand for the contours of the terrain. Bierstadt's true subjects in these works were the light and the space between fore, middle, and distant areas. Bierstadt made a group of smaller plein-air oil sketches presenting an even more broadly brushed panorama that captures the overall sweep of the landscape, sacrificing specifics for a broader sense of the topography.²² When he turned to composing his easel paintings, Bierstadt employed numerous plein-air and studio sketches, each work adding to the sum of the artist's knowledge of the site, relieving him of the need to make any one of them a labor-intensive, comprehensive study of the scenery.

20. Information courtesy of Arthur J. Phelan, who has compiled detailed information and photographs of the site. Bierstadt's inscription indicates how easy it was to confuse one range of mountains with another; the Wasatch mountains are over 100 miles southwest of this spot. Many of the inscriptions on the verso of Bierstadt's oil sketches of the Wind River Mountains bear such erroneous locations.

21. Bierstadt's inscription on the verso reads, *Among the Wind River Mts / Wasatch Mts in the distance / Rocky Mts. region.*

22. Five of those oil sketches are in the collection of the Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Tex.: *Wind River Mts, Nebraska* (31.14/33); *Laramie Plains, Nebraska* (31.14/27); *Buffalo on Laramie Plains, Nebraska* (31.14/28); *Wind River Mountains, Nebraska* (31.14/29); *Platte River, Nebraska* (31.14/32).

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 75

On the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate, 1860

Oil on millboard, 12 × 18 in.

Signed and dated lower right: *ABierstadt. 60*

Inscribed verso: *on the Sweetwater near the Devil's*

Gate / sketched 1859 / Nebraska near South Pass,

Wyoming / price \$100, with Frame

National Academy Museum, New York

Bierstadt's elevation to the rank of full academician at the NAD in 1860 required that he deposit a diploma picture with the Academy. Not wanting to deprive himself of a major work, he designated *On the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate* as his diploma piece.²³ Painted in 1860, this small work was based on sketches made on site the year before. On the verso, he had written: *on the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate / sketched 1859 / Nebraska near South Pass, Wyoming / price \$100, with Frame*. The price suggests that, despite its small size, this was a painting he hoped to sell and thus considered finished and marketable. Bierstadt undoubtedly knew by this date that collectors such as Samuel P. Avery and the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon were actively seeking such choice, small works (see chap. 4, esp. 86–89; and cats. 23, 48, 55, 56). Oil sketches made after the fact could be marketed without raiding the artist's cache of on-site studies critical to the success of his easel paintings.

23. See Kevin Avery's entry on this painting in Barbara Novak and Annette Blaugrund, eds., *Next to Nature: Landscape Paintings from the National Academy of Design* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, for the National Academy of Design, 1980), 116–17.





Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 76

The Trappers' Camp, 1861

Oil on millboard, 13 × 19 in.

Signed and dated lower left: *ABierstadt / 1861*

Inscribed verso: *The Trappers' Camp / Rocky Mountains /*

A. Bierstadt artist / Studio Building / 15, 10th St., New York

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, Whitney

Collection of Sporting Art Fund, given in memory of Harry

Payne Whitney, B.A. 1894, and Payne Whitney, B.A. 1898, by

Frances P. Garvan, B.A. 1897, M.A. (Hon.) 1922



FIG. 106 Albert Bierstadt, *Wind River Camp, Lander*, 1859. Oil on paper mounted on board, 13 × 10½ in. Private collection

In December 1861 Bierstadt's finished oil sketch titled *The Trappers' Camp* sold for sixty-five dollars at the Artists' Fund Sale, an event held at the Studio Building, which "attracted a large and miscellaneous audience. . . . The most spirited competition was for the works of Durand, Huntington, Casilear, Kensett, Leutze, Gifford, Hubbard, Whittredge, and Bierstadt. . . . 'The Trappers' Camp,' one of Bierstadt's Rocky Mountain Studies, \$65."²⁴ Bierstadt's scene conveys a sense of solitude and vulnerability as the three trappers make camp for the night. The brooding landscape resembles the topography Bierstadt painted extensively around the Devil's Gate and South Pass in present-day Wyoming (see cats. 74, 75).

Clearly fascinated by the juxtaposition of warm firelight and cooler moonlight, Bierstadt painted at least two similar western nocturnes. In 1859 he painted *Wind River Camp, Lander* (fig. 106), rearranging the same compositional elements two years later for *The Trappers' Camp*. The artist may have been inspired by the numerous European paintings of volcanic eruptions (notably of Mount Etna and Mount Vesuvius), which often paired the reddish heat of firelight (or volcanic lava) with the cooler spill of moonlight.²⁵ Bierstadt himself borrowed this trope in 1868 for his own painting of Mount Vesuvius.²⁶

Bierstadt thought highly enough of *The Trappers' Camp* that he arranged to borrow it back for inclusion in an exhibition at the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy in 1862.²⁷ Beginning at this time Bierstadt became more confident in exhibiting and selling such finished sketches through charity auctions and exhibitions. Another painting of South Pass had sold in May 1861 at the Patriotic Fund for fifty dollars, and Bierstadt continued to contribute small finished sketches to the Artists' Fund in 1862²⁸ and to the Sanitary Fair in 1864 (see cat. 81).

24. *New York Post*, 23 December 1861; cited in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 164.

25. See in particular the paintings of the English artist Joseph Wright of Derby; Judy Egerton, *Joseph Wright of Derby* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990).

26. *Mt. Vesuvius*, 1868, oil on canvas, 17½ × 24 in., The Cleveland Museum of Art.

27. Catalogue of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, 1862; cited in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 149.

28. *New York Post*, 24 December 1862, notes Bierstadt contributed a *Swiss Lake* that sold for \$163; cited in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 149.



Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 77

Bison with Coyotes in the Background

Oil on paper mounted on panel, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.

Signed lower left: AB [in monogram]

Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles

On his second trip west, in 1863, Bierstadt “put his color-box, camp-stool, and sketching-umbrella into the buggy, hitched a team of the wagon-horses to it, and, taking one of our own party in with him, declared his intention of visiting the battle-field solely as ‘our special artist.’”²⁹ Fitz Hugh Ludlow noted Bierstadt had plenty of opportunity to observe and record various animals, particularly during the early part of the trip, and at one point retrieved Bierstadt from his labors to provide the artist with the opportunity to sketch a wounded buffalo bull, held at bay by the wranglers (see chap. 1, 38). Henry Tuckerman paraphrased Ludlow’s account of Bierstadt’s field exploits in his chapter on the artist:

Our artist dismounted, brought out his color box, fixed his camp-stool, and took the charcoal in hand. We rode toward the dying warrior, and shouted at him. A new glare reddened his sullen eyes; he bowed his colossal head till his beard swept the

29. Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent*, 62.



FIG. 107 Albert Bierstadt, *Buffalo Chase*. Oil on canvas, 20 × 28 in. From the Collection of Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, 0126.1170

tangled grass; he erected his tail, letting its tuft wave back flag-like in the wind, and made one mad plunge forward. For a moment all his wild majesty was royally alive in him. We veered, and he turned on us. We pretended to fly, and again he charged. With every shifting posture the artist changed his place, and the charcoal quietly moved on. Parrhasius was among the buffaloes! . . . Bierstadt spent the whole remainder of the morning in transferring our bulls to his sketch-box. . . . [I] wonder if ever before color-studies of charging bison had been taken in a double buggy.³⁰

Although the specific study Bierstadt painted on this occasion is unidentified, *Bison with Coyotes in the Background*, an impressively detailed work, records a magnificent bull like the one felled by another of the companions and described by Ludlow:

Upright, the hump of this bull must have stood over five feet high. It was the hair-shedding season, and all abaft the hump his body was as bare, save in two or three isolated patches of frowzy, faded wool, as a Chinese dog. This fact was advantageous to the examination of his anatomy; and though he carried a head and chest only less ponderous than a young elephant's, I found a beautiful shapeliness of curve about his haunches, a cleanness of line, and even slenderness in his hind legs, that looked rather like a deer or member of the elk family than any of the bovine tribes.³¹

Bierstadt's oil sketch of a dying bull brings Ludlow's description of the animal into sharp focus, the ghostly contours of a pair of coyotes appropriate reminders of the bull's ultimate fate. Bierstadt incorporated this buffalo in his easel painting *Buffalo Chase* (fig. 107), which appears to have been painted shortly after the artist's return from this second trip west.

30. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1867), 391–92.

31. Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent*, 66.

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 78

Study of a Pronghorn, ca. 1863

Oil on paper, $13\frac{1}{4} \times 14\frac{1}{4}$ in.

Signed lower right: *ABierstadt*

National Museum of Wildlife Art,
Jackson, Wyoming

Not all of the animals Bierstadt sketched in the field were alive. Dead animals afforded the artist opportunity to study them at length, and for skittish creatures like the swift pronghorn antelope, perhaps the only opportunity to sketch them with any accuracy. Ludlow mentioned at least one instance in which the artist carefully studied a pronghorn that had been brought in by the group's hunters for dinner. In his study of the animal's head and forequarters, Bierstadt captured the physiognomy of the pronghorn, a reddish brown patch on the shoulder easily read as dried blood. Ludlow noted that "after dinner, the artist opened his color-box, and began making a study of the antelope's head, which had been left entire for his purpose."³² Artist and writer must have conversed while Bierstadt painted his sketch, because Ludlow's written description of the pronghorn's anatomy focuses on the precise characteristics visible in Bierstadt's sketch, including the large, rear-set ears, prominent eyes, and distinctive hooves.³³

Not surprisingly, the majority of Bierstadt's detailed field sketches of wild animals are of dead or dying specimens, a necessary condition given the general elusiveness of his subjects, the need for fresh food, and the amount of time required to capture such close portraits in paint. A sketch of a dead doe stretched out on the grass is more typical of these works (fig. 108). In *Study of a Pronghorn*, however, Bierstadt has propped up the animal's head and shoulder and in doing so given it a more lifelike appearance. Undoubtedly the artist found he could learn more of the animal's structure this way than with a specimen stretched out on the ground.

32. Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent*, 50.

33. *Ibid.*, 38.



FIG. 108 Albert Bierstadt, *Native of the Woods*, ca. 1872. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, $5\frac{5}{8} \times 10$ in. Private collection





Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 79

White Horse and Sunset, ca. 1863

Oil on board, 11½ × 15½ in.

Signed lower left: *ABierstadt*

Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody,

Wyoming, Gift of Carman H. Messmore

Fitz Hugh Ludlow commented on Bierstadt's extensive animal studies, noting he "had made two or three studies of game and horses" while the rest of the party was out hunting.³⁴ Numerous studies of horses, recorded individually or in pairs on paperboard, attest to his keen eye for the specifics of equine anatomy. A sheet of paper depicting a pair of horses painted against a background of washed-in green pigment demonstrates Bierstadt's command of equine form (fig. 109). His subjects here were not blooded horses, and the artist understood and rendered faithfully the anatomical shortcomings of his subjects. The bay in particular is a ewe-necked, roman-nosed, narrow-chested creature with an upright shoulder and thin, sloping hindquarters. Sketching rapidly, allowing slight fluctuations of scale across the sheet of paper, Bierstadt did not take time to flatter his subjects.

Bierstadt's interest in horses predated his trip west with Ludlow. Adopting a more evenly painted, neutral-toned background, Bierstadt painted a suite of horse studies, their conformation indicative of more careful breeding (see fig. 28). The neutral background allowed Bierstadt to adjust the animal's outline, making corrections commensurate with the seriousness of his endeavor. The recent reappearance of a finished painting of a Standardbred trotter dated 1860 (fig. 110) indicates Bierstadt's interest in horses was more than anecdotal, and his skill in painting them considerable. Whether the artist

34. Ludlow, *The Heart of the Continent*, 56. Ludlow also devotes two pages to praise of the horses of the Arapaho Indians; see his 199–200.

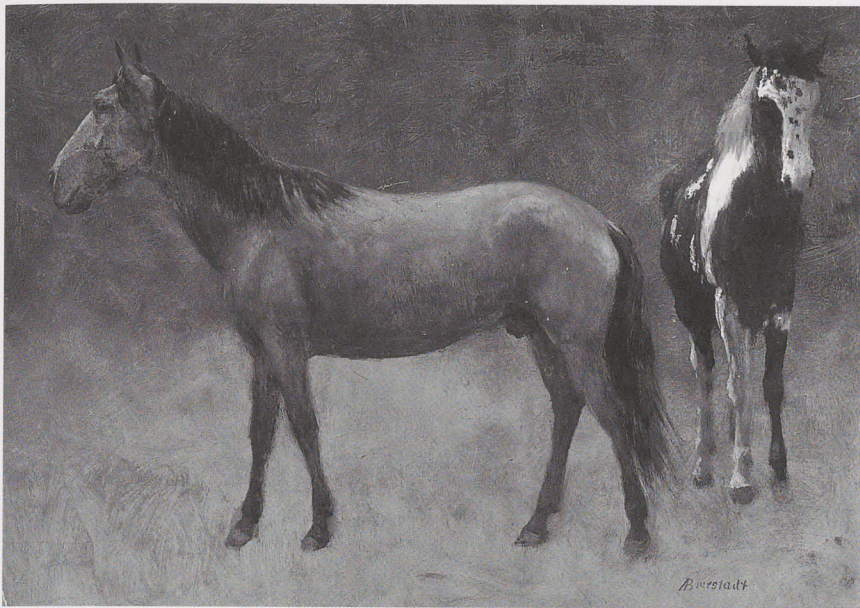


FIG. 109 Albert Bierstadt, *Two Horses*. Oil on board, 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. Courtesy Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming, 33.61

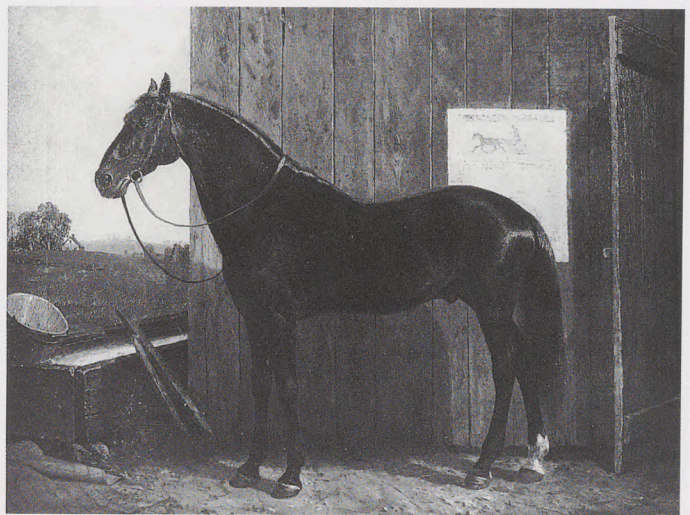


FIG. 110 Albert Bierstadt, *Champion Trotter*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 25 in. Alexander Gallery, New York

toyed with the idea of painting “horse-portraits” or simply enjoyed the exercise, he painted a large number of complete studies, most of which seem to occur early in his career.

Most intriguing among the equine studies is *White Horse and Sunset*, in which the artist has painted a detailed study of a white horse over an already complete sunset landscape sketch. Recalling Bierstadt’s superimposed Italian priest and peasant woman (see fig. 101), this work might more accurately be termed a white horse on top of a sunset, as the scale and orientation of the one have no bearing on or relationship to the other. The sunset is more impressive than the artist’s handling of the darkened landscape; Bierstadt clearly recycled the sketch when presented with the opportunity to paint the white horse. The horse itself is a closely observed rendering of a less than spectacular animal, but one whose patience was well suited to the artist’s need for recording in detail the anatomical complexity of its forehead: Bierstadt gave cursory attention to the hindquarters and hind legs, concentrating on the junctures of head, neck, shoulder, and forelegs, including the whorls of hair in its coat and the pronounced veins visible on its face. The interior of the raised foreleg comes in for special attention. For the artist to have painted it in such detail, someone must have held it up while Bierstadt sketched it, and evidently the somnolent animal did not mind the indignity. The result is a carefully rendered study of a horse, its form accurately understood.

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 80

In the Foothills of the Rockies, ca. 1863

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 14 × 19 in.

Signed lower right: ABierstadt

D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc., New York

In letters written and published during his first trip west in 1859, Bierstadt compared American scenery to that of Europe, invoking descriptions of Italy and Switzerland to provide a recognizable, respected context for a place few Americans had seen. Faced with describing the vertical majesty of the American Rockies, Bierstadt wrote, "The mountains here are much higher than those at home [New England]. . . . The color of the mountains and of the plains, and indeed, that of the entire country, reminds one of the color of Italy; in fact, we have here the Italy of America in a primitive condition."³⁵

He was neither the first nor the only traveler to invoke that comparison: Bayard Taylor, writing for the *New York Tribune* ten years earlier, included a chapter titled "The Italy of the West" in his book *Eldorado*, in which he made favorable comparisons between Mediterranean and Californian scenery and sunsets.³⁶ That comparison also provided affirmation of New World wonders as deserving of favorable comparison with the Old World's centuries of civilization and culture. Bierstadt's four years in Europe thus found an outlet in the American West, lending additional credence to the time he had spent studying abroad and providing him with a smooth transition from foreign to domestic views.

Although this oil sketch is not dated, in style and subject it relates to a series of oil sketches of the Rockies Bierstadt made during and after his second trip west, in 1863. The suite of sketches from the first trip in 1859 is characterized by their broadly brushed foregrounds and limited detail (see cat. 71). This sketch, and others like it, have a more uniform level of finish across the entire surface, as the artist picked out details of ground cover in the immediate foreground. The distance has a more atmospheric feel, owing to Bierstadt's use of white paint to indicate the glaciers and residual snowpack and by extension the geologic character of the front range. The brushwork is in general made up of shorter strokes and more opaque paint, and the vantage point is much closer to the valley floor, looking out and up to the mountains in the distance.

35. Bierstadt, "The Rocky Mountains, July 10th, 1859," letter published in the *Crayon* 6 (September 1859): 287. He went on to describe the western mountains as resembling "the Bernese Alps; they are of granite formation, the same as the Swiss mountains and their jagged summits, covered with snow and mingling with the clouds, present a scene which every lover of landscape would gaze upon with unqualified delight."

36. Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado, or the Adventures in the Path of Empire Comprising a Voyage to California, via Panama, Life in San Francisco and Monterey, Pictures of the Gold Region, and Experiences of Mexican Travel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf; reprint, 1949); cited in Nancy K. Anderson, "Albert Bierstadt: The Path to California, 1830–1874" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1985), 203–4.





Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 81

Valley of the Yosemite, 1864

Oil on board, 11¼ × 19¼ in.

Signed and dated lower right: *ABierstadt. / 64*

Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Martha C. Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865, 47.1236

Often cited as evidence of Bierstadt's abilities as a plein-air oil sketcher,³⁷ this small painting on board was undoubtedly done in the studio. Not only did Bierstadt not take such solid supports into the field, but more to the point, this work demonstrates the same synthetic approach to the scenery found in his monumental canvases of the valley. Bierstadt used this finished sketch as his inspiration for the much larger *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California* painted the following year (fig. 111). A writer for *Harper's Weekly* seemed more taken with the small version than its final statement, commenting:

The general aspect of this picture has been somewhat familiarized to the public eye by a small and exquisite study of the same subject in the exhibition of the Sanitary Fair a year ago. It is a bright picture with a certain freshness of form which is striking, and there is a fine masterly facility in the execution. But the subject seems for some reason inadequate to so huge a canvas. The interest is disproportionate to the size.³⁸

37. See Richard A. Fine, "Albert Bierstadt, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, and the American Western Landscape," *American Studies* 15 (Fall 1974): 97–98.

38. "The Exhibition of the National Academy," *Harper's Weekly* 9 (13 May 1865): 291.



FIG. 111 Albert Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 64½ × 96½ in. Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama, Gift of the Birmingham Public Library, 1991.879

Valley of the Yosemite is somewhat unusual in Bierstadt's oeuvre in being a miniature version of a later painting rather than a smaller element of it. More frequently the artist made small finished paintings (usually for sale) of subjects he did not pursue in so direct a manner. In this particular case both works are clearly composed studio products, the scale having no ultimate bearing on the finished qualities of either version.

The popular preacher Thomas Starr King wrote impassioned letters extolling Yosemite's wonders as revealing God's hand in each natural feature.³⁹ King's prose, coupled with his description of talented painters as artist-priests,⁴⁰ probably encouraged Fitz Hugh Ludlow to describe Bierstadt's goal as that of reaching "the original site of the Garden of Eden."⁴¹ Yosemite was not just another site for an artist to reach and capture as a trophy rendered in paint, but a post-Civil War avenue toward spiritual unity with the landscape. The heathen wilderness of the late eighteenth century had been replaced with a form of Protestant deism acknowledging the spiritual aspect of nature as a form of artistic religion, to be preached by the artist and worshiped by the masses, each participant deriving spiritual grace from the encounter. It was a particularly apt metaphor for a nation at war with itself. Ludlow answered Louis Legrand Noble's characterization of Frederic Church as a hero-explorer in *After Icebergs with a Painter* with his own fashioning of Bierstadt as the artist-priest of Yosemite. Beginning with *Valley of the Yosemite* Bierstadt would settle on this scene as his vision of the Garden of Eden for a devastated America.

39. See Thomas Starr King, "Selections from a Lecture-Sermon after Visiting Yosemite Valley," *The California Scrap-Book*, ed. Oscar T. Shuck (San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft & Co., 1869). King's letters from California were published in several New York newspapers and the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* between May and October 1863.

40. Thomas Starr King, *The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscapes, and Poetry* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee, 1860). See also Nancy Anderson's discussion of Bierstadt's relationship with King in Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt: Cho-Looke, the Yosemite Fall* (San Diego, Calif.: Timken Art Gallery, 1986), unpaginated.

41. Fitz Hugh Ludlow, "Seven Weeks in the Great Yo-Semite," *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (June 1864): 740.

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 82

Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite Valley, California, 1872

Oil on paper, 13⁷/₈ × 19¹/₈ in.

Inscribed verso: *Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite Valley, California*

Private collection, Houston

In June 1871, traveling by rail car in comfort and at some speed, Bierstadt traveled once again to California for an extended stay. His return to Yosemite took place during late February 1872, to obtain views denied the casual visitor. The local press, which paid close attention to the artist's whereabouts, reported:

Albert Bierstadt, who has taken up his residence in this state for some months, is first in the field. With characteristic enterprise he has pushed into the Yosemite Valley this early—nearly three months in advance of ordinary tourists—to make sketches of the winter aspects of its unequalled scenery, when the peaks and cliffs are covered deep with snow, and the falls tumble amid icicles and ice-sheeted rocks. He entered the valley ten days ago, by way of Haight's Cove and the canyon of the Merced River, and will spend considerable time there.⁴²

Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite Valley, California is the most accomplished of these sketches, capturing the chilly beauty and remote isolation of the valley during the winter months. The weak winter light on the granite peaks provides the only warmth in the scene, emphasizing the rugged grandeur of the valley walls. Remote locations like Yosemite lent themselves to winter fantasies, and Bierstadt painted it several times clad in a blanket of snow. The artist's handling of the light and geology in his sketches served as a guidepost for his fully resolved canvases of Yosemite in the winter. Winter was not a subject common in American landscape painting, because most artists had long since returned from the field and were at work painting in their heated studios.

Winter scenes were far more common in genre paintings depicting outdoor activities, from wood gathering and hunting to ice skating. Pragmatically, sketching *en plein air* during the winter was uncomfortable, encouraging rapid activity of brief duration. Another of Bierstadt's winter sketches from this trip (fig. 112) presents a more hurried depiction of the valley floor, its features sketched in swiftly in deference to the bone-chilling cold implied by the overcast sky. Church's views of Niagara in winter never culminated in a major painting (see cats. 24, 25), nor did Thomas Hiram Hotchkiss's winter sketches of the Catskills.⁴³ Bierstadt's finished painting *Cathedral Rocks in Winter*, completed and exhibited in rapid order after his emergence from the valley, served notice to other artists that his command of California's most spectacular scenery was still unmatched.⁴⁴

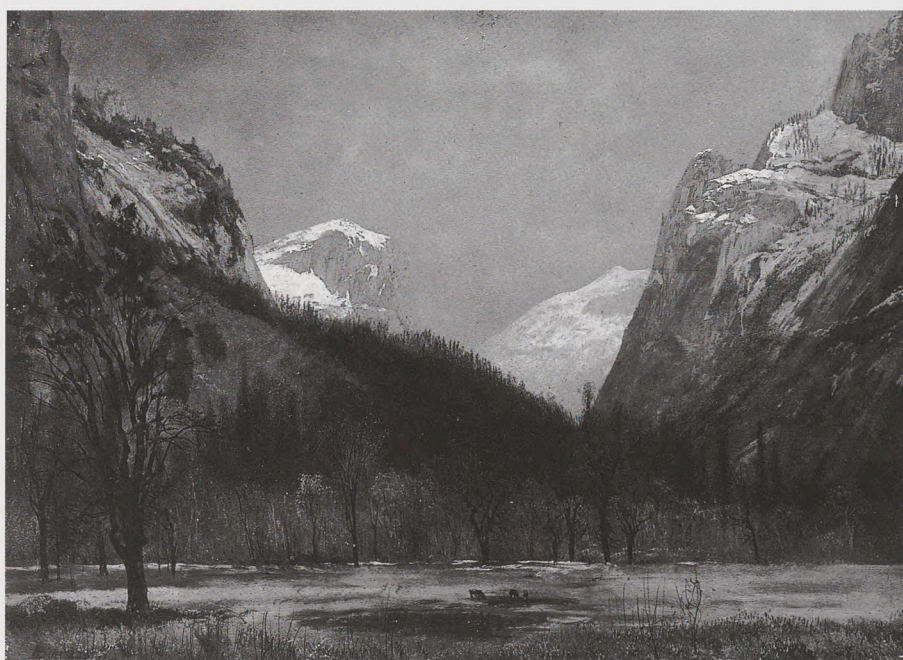
42. "Art Items. Bierstadt after Snow-Scenery. What Keith Is About. Doings of San Francisco Artists," *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, 5 March 1872. Bierstadt scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries Collection, Gift of Joyce Randall Edwards.

43. For Hotchkiss, see Barbara Novak, *Dreams and Shadows: Thomas H. Hotchkiss in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, in association with Universe Books, 1992), 32–40.

44. The painting went on view at the fourth reception of the San Francisco Art Association in June 1872; see Anderson, "Albert Bierstadt: The Path to California," 335.



FIG. 112 Albert Bierstadt,
Winter in Yosemite, ca. 1872.
Oil on paper mounted on
canvas, 13½ × 19 in. Private
collection



Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 83

Woodward's Garden Animal Studies, 1872

Oil on paper, 9 × 14 in.

Signed lower left: ABierstadt

Inscribed and dated verso:

Woodwards Garden / Study

for Seals / 1872

Private collection



45. Anderson, "Albert Bierstadt: The Path to California," 343–44.

46. *San Francisco Bulletin*, 2 May 1872; cited in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 225.

47. "For Bierstadt, the coast of Capri became the coast of California and the Faraglioni Rocks became the Farallone Islands. . . . sea lions and gulls replaced fishermen and boats. . . . Wild animals, indigenous to the Pacific, define the California coast as a New World landscape in the same way that Italian fishermen link Capri with the domesticated Old World"; Anderson, "Albert Bierstadt: The Path to California," 95. The author also makes this point with specific reference to *Lake Lucerne* and *Cho-Looke, the Yosemite Falls* in her article, "European Roots of Albert Bierstadt's Views of the American West," *Antiques* 139, no. 1 (January 1991): 220–29 ff.

48. Among the visitors of note was the poet Robert Frost, whose poem "At Woodward's Gardens" is set in the attraction's zoo. My thanks to Douglas Reeves for this information.

49. See Jim Crain, *California in Depth: A Stereoscopic History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), esp. 18, 69, 111.

In California, Bierstadt often eschewed familiar and easily accessible areas for the more remote and exotic locales of the Farallone Islands and the Kern River valley, areas generally associated with geologists rather than artists.⁴⁵ As with Church's going to Palestine and Petra, places considered dangerous and remote, Bierstadt sought out different places to keep his work fresh. In April 1872 he visited the remote Farallone Islands off the coast of San Francisco.⁴⁶ Undoubtedly drawn in part by their similarity to the Faraglioni Islands off Capri, Bierstadt reveled in the colonies of sea lions, seals, and birds.⁴⁷ His sketches of these animals range from entire herds of seals and flocks of birds to closely observed individual animals, each painted with acute detail. *Seal Rock, Farallones* (fig. 113) shows an entire colony of seals disporting on the rocks while gulls wheel overhead. As is the case with most of Bierstadt's plein-air oil sketches of these coastal rocks and animals, there is a hurried quality to the brushwork that conveys both the stresses and difficulties of achieving such a location, and an ease and skill in capturing the mobile forms of the seals.

Still, Bierstadt availed himself of sketching opportunities in more civilized surroundings, painting a sheet of oil studies at Woodward's Gardens, where he could work in comfort and without regard for terrain and offshore weather. Woodward's Gardens was founded in 1866 by the San Francisco hotelier and philanthropist Robert B. Woodward as a public amusement park and gardens; it became the city's most popular resort until it closed in 1894.⁴⁸ The complex included a lake, zoo, sea-lion pond, the nation's first salt-water aquarium, garden, and art gallery, all connected to Woodward's nearby residence and residential hotel. Woodward was an avid art collector who used the lobby of his men-only temperance hotel, the Good Cheer House (founded in 1852), as an art gallery, the art collection curated by the California artist Virgil Williams and including works by Bierstadt; Eadweard Muybridge and Carleton Watkins photographed many aspects of the complex.⁴⁹ Located in the block created by Mission, Duboce, Valencia, and



FIG. 113 Albert Bierstadt, *Seal Rock, Farallones*, ca. 1872. Oil on paper, 14 × 19 in. From the collection of Mr. and Mrs. James Fish

Fourteenth streets, it was well inland from the rocky coast and provided Bierstadt with animals he could study at length.⁵⁰

On this sheet of animal studies the artist painted two views of mother and baby seals at rest. In the upper right of the page, a third vignette of a seal provided the artist with the model for a seal perched on the rocks in *Seal Rock* (fig. 114), painted about the same year. The remainder of the page depicts an eagle, gulls, a fish, and studies of two pelicans. The white pelican, its veins visible through the skin of its throat, is among the artist's most clearly observed animals, yet it never made an appearance in any of the artist's easel paintings of the California coast. As a reference sketch, the primary value of *Woodward's Garden* was in the quality of observation Bierstadt mustered as he painted. The neutral background tone and visual isolation of each group of animals suggest the intensity with which the artist worked on individual vignettes, as though creating a paradigmatic animal to represent each species. In his coastal sketch of the seal colony, Bierstadt adapted his focus to encompass the setting and dynamics among the herd of seals. A comparison illuminates how much the artist relied on different styles of sketches to compose his easel paintings.

50. See J. Kingston Pierce, *San Francisco, You're History!* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1995), 188–92. Woodward also founded a museum of natural history and a substantial library (3,000 volumes) for the city's benefit. See Kevin Starr, "Art and the City," *The [California] State Librarian's Weekly Column* for 21 May 1996, published on the Internet, State Librarian's Column Index, CSL Home Page. Woodward's Gardens received San Francisco Historic Landmark no. 454; there is a plaque on this site. I am grateful to Douglas Reeves and Susan Harvey Reeves of Albany, Calif., for the information concerning R. B. Woodward, Woodward's Gardens, and his involvement with the arts in California.



FIG. 114 Albert Bierstadt, *Seal Rock*, ca. 1872. Oil on canvas mounted on wood panel, 41½ × 56½ in. (framed). New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut, Alix W. Stanley Fund, 1962.¹⁴

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 84

A View in the Bahamas, after 1877

Oil on paper, 14 × 19¼ in.

Signed lower right: *ABierstadt*

Private collection



As had been the case on Capri and elsewhere, Bierstadt's plein-air sketches varied from closely rendered details of plants and shore to hastily composed tableaux, often involving several different scales or angles of perspective. Oil sketches of banana plants, citrus trees, and the glistening blue water form a suite of brightly colored vignettes Bierstadt painted in the Bahamas, beginning in 1877. *A View in the Bahamas* presents a complete scene in which the enlarged trees and fruit, looming above the diminutive houses and human inhabitants, lend the impression of gigantism to the lush foliage of the islands. Additional scenes of waves and shore and of individual palms flesh out the repertoire of compositional elements by now familiar to the artist's way of working.

In 1877 Bierstadt's wife, Rosalie, was diagnosed with consumption, dealing a blow that was both emotional and financial, because her doctor recommended extended stays in the Bahamas for her health. Until her death in 1893, the Bierstadts made annual winter visits to Nassau. The local press there took an interest in the artist, and the Bierstadts' living quarters at the Royal Victoria Hotel were decorated with Albert's work. In the words of one observer, the couple's "salon [was] hung round with her husband's sketches,"⁵¹ likely those of the local scenery. In making the hotel rooms feel like home, the Bierstadts quite possibly put at arm's length the more sobering reason for the annual visits.

51. Quoted in L. D. Powles, *The Land of the Pink Pearl, or Recollections of Life in the Bahamas* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1888), 191; cited in Marc Simpson, Sally Mills, and Jennifer Saville, *The American Canvas: Paintings from the Collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1989), 126.



Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 85

Deer in a Mountain Home, ca. 1879

Oil on paper mounted on Masonite, 13³/₈ × 19¹/₈ in.

Signed lower right: *ABierstadt*

Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming,

Gift of Joseph M. Roebling



FIG. 115 After Albert Bierstadt, *A Mountain Range with Black-tailed Deer*. Engraving in A. Pendarves Vivian, *Wanderings in the Western Land* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1879), facing 305.

In 1879 Arthur Pendarves Vivian wrote and published a travel book titled *Wanderings in the Western Land* about his excursions in the American West. To illustrate his volume the author arranged to have a group of Bierstadt's oil sketches engraved, among them *Deer in a Mountain Home*. Many of these sketches were detailed studies of individual animals native to the American West, while a few show groups of animals in a landscape setting. Although it is possible that Bierstadt painted a group of oil sketches specifically to answer Vivian's need for illustrations, it is more likely, given the volume of painted sketches in the artist's studio, that he and the author chose a number of animal studies and landscapes suitable for engraving (see chap. 3, 76–77).

Deer in a Mountain Home is typical of Bierstadt's work during the 1860s and 1870s, especially a group of oil sketches focusing on distant views of the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada.⁵² Broad strokes of thin paint swirl and flow across the unfinished foreground. The artist spent most of his effort on the mountain peaks, using small strokes of thicker paint to articulate the exposed bedrock and the groundcover mantling the lower slopes. At some point after completing the mountain view, Bierstadt returned to his sketch and painted the small herd of deer arranged across the foreground. Each animal is painted with delicate precision, indicating the time and attention the artist lavished on this aspect of the overall work. As is the case with many of Bierstadt's multifigure sketches, the scale varies from one animal to the other, a disparity carried over to the engraved version (fig. 115). By 1879 Bierstadt had a considerable cache of detailed studies of individual animals from which to choose; however, the narrative quality of a scene like *Deer in a Mountain Home* is unusual among the artist's oil sketches. If Vivian wanted scenes depicting animals in their habitat, he may have suggested that Bierstadt add the deer to an existing landscape sketch.

52. See in particular *Sunrise in the Sierras*, n.d., National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., reproduced in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 235.



Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 86

The Wreck of the "Ancon" in Loring Bay, Alaska, 1889

Oil on paper mounted on panel, 14 × 19¾ in.

Signed lower right: *ABierstadt*

Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Martha C. Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865, 47.1250



FIG. 116 Albert Bierstadt, *Stormy Lake Scene (Pacific Northwest)*, ca. 1889. Oil on paper mounted on board, $7\frac{1}{4} \times 19\frac{1}{4}$ in. Private collection

In 1889 Bierstadt returned to the Pacific Northwest, which he had first visited with Ludlow in 1863. Traveling by train from Montreal to the Canadian West Coast, Bierstadt then boarded the side-wheeler steamship *Ancon*. On 28 August the ship ran aground, stranding Bierstadt and the other passengers for five days until they could be rescued. Describing his experience as a "narrow escape," Bierstadt reassured his wife that he "was busy all the time and have 60 studies in color and two books of drawings of Alaska."⁵³ This oil sketch survives as one of the artist's finest small works, while the numerous pencil sketches and oil studies have yet to reappear. It is certainly possible that of the rapidly brushed, minimally articulated oil sketches identified as of the northwest coast, *Stormy Lake Scene (Pacific Northwest)* (fig. 116) is one of the studies in color the artist managed to make during that five-day interval in Alaska. Clearly the bulk of the oil sketches made during this brief interlude would be necessarily summary in handling and detail.

The Wreck of the "Ancon" has been linked to a print of the listing steamship. Given the length of time Bierstadt was stranded, and the description of offloading the passengers as a calm, deliberate activity, it seems likely the *Ancon* remained trapped on the rocks long enough for him to fix his composition, and for other artists and photographers to capture the same vista as well. *The Wreck of the "Ancon"* was probably finished after the artist returned to Vancouver, if not back east. In character its finished qualities are far more pronounced than in the relatively cursory plein-air sketches made along the northwest coast, and as a lasting remembrance of a "narrow escape," this small finished sketch carried enhanced meaning for the artist.

53. Bierstadt to Rosalie Bierstadt, Vancouver, 18 September 1889; transcript in the paintings department curatorial files of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, written out by the artist's niece, Rosalie Osborne Mayer.

Albert Bierstadt

CAT. 87

Butterfly, 1900

Oil on paper, 4½ × 8 in. (sight)

Signed and dated lower right: *Albert Bierstadt / July 13/1900*

Inscribed lower left in pencil: *The Garden of Eden is not / more beautiful than / Interlaken*

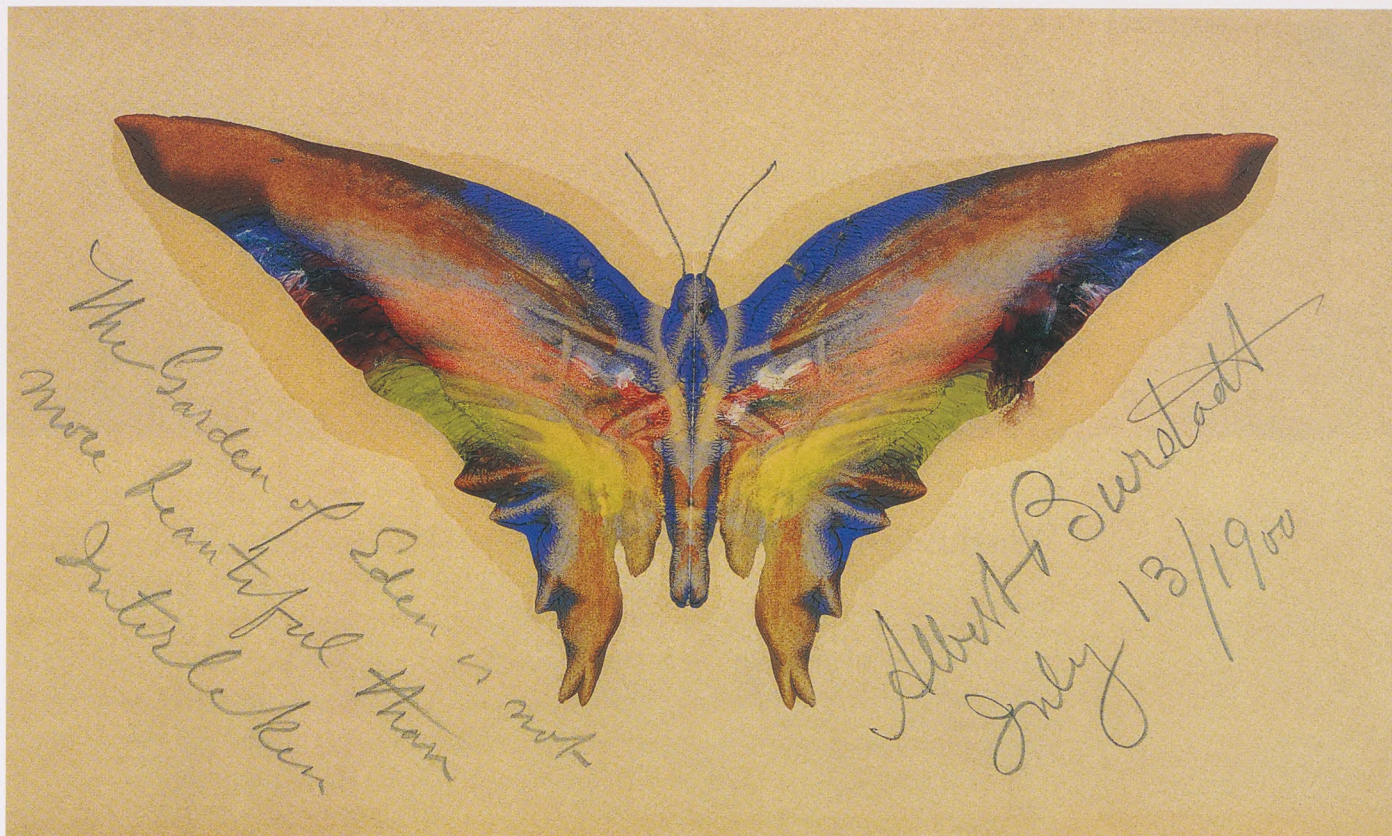
Jan and Warren Adelson, New York

It had always been Bierstadt's habit to welcome people, especially the press, to his studio to watch him paint. This was an unusual gesture, because most artists shielded the act of painting and preserved their privacy in the studio. Faced with diminished interest in his larger paintings, Bierstadt turned his spacious studio into a salon, painting butterflies on paper as parlor tricks to charm his female visitors. As one such lucky visitor enthused,

We women were so glad we *were* women that afternoon, for Mr. Bierstadt presented each lady with a souvenir. This is how he made them. We all clustered about the table and he took out a palette, a knife, and some large slips of cartridge paper. Two or three daubs of pigment on the paper, a quick fold, and holding it still folded against a pane of glass, he made two or three strokes of that wizard-like palette knife on the outside, and hey, presto! a wonderful Brazilian butterfly or moth, even the veining on the wings complete! A pencil touch added the antennae, the artist's autograph was added in the corner, and now we each of us own a painting by Bierstadt.⁵⁴

Bierstadt's butterflies have an enduring charm, both for their informality and abstract qualities. That so many have survived in good condition confirms the care with which they were treated even as the artist's career went into eclipse. As a kind of Rorschach test of the artist's patronage, they are reminders of the changes in expectation and fashion that bedevil artists who live past the time of their greatest popularity. That small, brightly colored butterflies could evoke the same kind of enthusiasm once generated by his Great Pictures must have been a bittersweet realization for an artist of Bierstadt's reputation.

54. "New York Gossip. Albert Bierstadt's Picture, 'The Landing of Columbus,'" *Detroit Free Press*, 15 May 1892. Bierstadt scrapbook, Brooklyn Museum of Art Libraries Collection, Gift of Joyce Randall Edwards. Also quoted in Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1974), 302–3.





Worthington Whittredge

CAT. 88

Market at Subiaco, ca. 1856–57

Oil on paper, 5½ × 15½ in.

Signed lower left: *W. Whittredge*

Inscribed verso: *a twenty minute Sketch made of
an Italian Market / at Subiaco*

Mr. and Mrs. Stuart P. Feld

During the summers spent in Italy, Whittredge and many of his fellow expatriates left Rome for the hill towns in search of picturesque scenery and relief from the heat. Often traveling together, these artists made sketches and kept diaries that form an account of their experiences. Sanford Gifford and Whittredge both visited Subiaco in 1856, perhaps together. Subiaco is set among the Sabine Mountains about thirty miles from Tivoli, up the valley of the Anio River. Its principal feature is the church dedicated to St. Benedict, built at the site of the saint's shrine three miles above the town. Whittredge remarked that "it was the Sabine mountains that I generally went to in summer because they were higher and cooler. Subiaco was usually my goal. The road there and the town itself were historical . . . as old as Rome and inseparably connected with its history. The Benedictine monastery, an immense structure, . . . commenced by St. Benedict himself and cut into the solid rock, was but a little way above the town, for the town itself was of little account."¹ Gifford attended services at the church and noted, "It being Sunday there were numerous figures whose rich festa costumes, groupings, and attitudes added greatly to the pictorial effect."²

Whittredge took the opportunity to sketch such a festa in his twenty-minute oil sketch of the market. His sketch is thinly painted, showing that the speed at which he

1. Worthington Whittredge, "Autobiography," original manuscript, reel D28, frame 126. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (AAA).

2. Gifford's journal, entry for 13 October, in his letter dated Rome, 15 October 1856. Gifford kept a daily journal on each of his European trips that he then sent to his father as a series of letters. A transcript of these letters is in AAA, reel D21.



FIG. 117 Worthington Whittredge, *Market near Subiaco*, 1862. Oil on canvas, $8\frac{1}{2} \times 19$ in. Unlocated

worked forced him to concentrate on capturing the essentials of the scene. The market unfolds along a gentle slope, anchored by two massive trees. Groups of brightly clad people rest and converse under the spreading branches, while others cluster around an open stage, where it appears someone is playing a stringed instrument. The monastery church rises above the trees in the middle distance. In this sketch Whittredge has used a highly abbreviated painterly shorthand. Individual swirls and dabs of paint show forms created from the first strokes put down, with no concern given to detail. *Market at Subiaco* is a paradigmatic plein-air oil sketch, capturing a moment in not much more time than it took for the artist to impress the scene on his mind. Unlike Bierstadt, whose "fifteen minute" sketches stretched well beyond an hour, Whittredge's "twenty minutes" appears to be closer to the truth (see chap. 1, 29).

From this vibrant, quick sketch Whittredge composed a slightly larger painting of the market (fig. 117). Both it and the smaller work might be termed sketches to varying degrees. In the more finished sketch Whittredge removed the central tree to open the prospect, leaving the massive tree at far left to anchor the composition's edge. As a result the church attains new prominence, rising higher above the horizon. The mountain backdrop too is enhanced in this version, perhaps in deference to Whittredge's retrospective assessment of what interested him about the region. In the transformation from plein-air sketch to small canvas, the larger work loses the sense of intimacy conveyed by the sketch through its hastily applied brushwork and immediacy of effect. That intimacy is replaced by a diffused focus on the panoramic activity in the foreground and the distant prospect of church and hills.

Worthington Whittredge

CAT. 89

Going to the Village

Oil on canvas, 8 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 11 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.

Signed lower left: *W. Whittredge*

D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc., New York

Upon returning from Europe to America, Whittredge felt overcome by the different character of the landscape, notably the wilder, rougher aspects of America's untamed wilderness. Oftentimes that disorganized vista was not true wilderness but uncultivated land verging on cleared fields and meadows. Whittredge spent much of 1860 sorting through his disorientation, trying to fashion his own stylistic response to once-familiar haunts. *Going to the Village*, an undated oil sketch, appears to be a transitional work appropriate to the themes and details of his canvases painted during 1861–62. If this was painted following his return to America, it adopts many of the conventions familiar to European and English bucolic landscapes. The overcast sky, chilly palette, and green-sward leading toward a village visible on the horizon recall those picturesque views; however, the split-rail fence suggests that Whittredge painted this sketch in America. Perhaps this was a stepping-stone back to a more "American" aesthetic, as the pasture and untended stream give way to the deeper forest edging the meadow. If so, this sketch fits the mold begun with *The Glen* of 1862 (unlocated),³ in which the open vista is replaced by the encroaching forest interior, which would become one of Whittredge's most common motifs. *Going to the Village* accords daily life a kind of primacy that is a basic component of his oeuvre.

Going to the Village is still framed within its original shadow box and gilded frame. Shadow boxes were initially designed so that small paintings might be placed upright on library shelves, surrounded by equally precious bound volumes. The oil sketch and the frame appear as new, showing none of the marks of aging typical of exposed frames and painted surfaces. The bright gilding and dark-toned wooden surround have the effect of presenting the sketch as a small precious gem, glittering within its protective shell. As such, shadow boxes encouraged the viewer to consider painted sketches as desirable works of art, enhancing their appeal for private collectors.

3. See Anthony F. Janson, *Worthington Whittredge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82.





Worthington Whittredge

CAT. 90

Encampment on the Plains, 1866

Oil on paper mounted on board, 7½ × 23 in.

Signed lower right: *W. Whittredge*

Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles

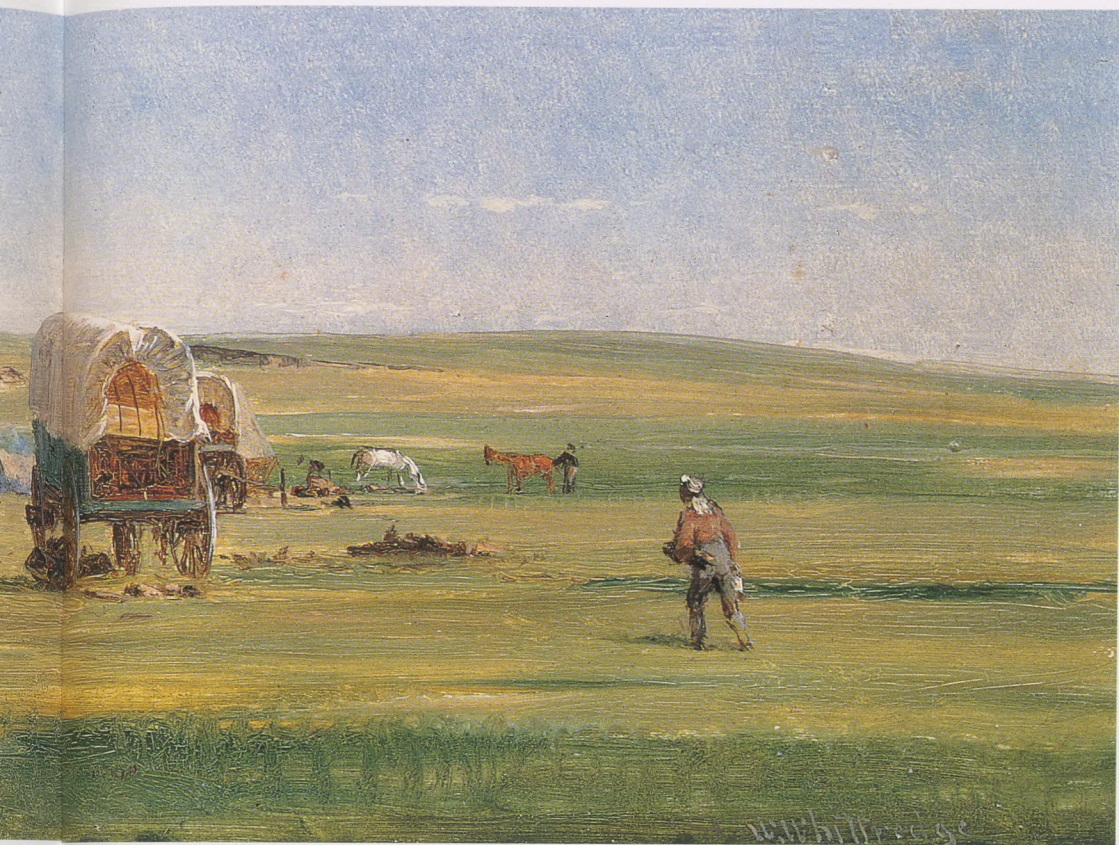
4. Whittredge, "The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge, 1820–1910," ed. John I. H. Baur, *Brooklyn Museum Journal* 1 (1942): 45–53. This section is titled "VII. The Trip to the Rockies with General Pope—June 1865, to October, 1866." In fact Whittredge traveled with Pope from June 1866, not 1865.

5. The artist recounted his route in his autobiography. Much of his itinerary may be verified with his dated oil sketches, notably works in the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Yale University Art Gallery.

In 1866 Whittredge went west for the first time, traveling under the auspices of General John Pope as a civilian attached to his staff for the sole purpose of sketching along the way.⁴ Departing in early June from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the expedition group made its way to Fort Kearney, Nebraska, en route to the South Platte River, following the Oregon Trail. They followed the Cache la Poudre River to Fort Collins, Colorado, and spent a few days in Denver, and from there traveled into New Mexico. Whittredge sketched in Santa Fe before heading back east via the Cimmaron Trail in September.⁵ *Encampment on the Plains* records the party's camp, the wagons and tents lined up in formation. As in Bierstadt's plein-air sketches of the plains and, most notably, his *Surveyor's Wagon in the Rockies* (cat. 71), Whittredge has captured the sweeping vista without losing the intimacy of man's activity in so vast a landscape.

Whittredge was unusual among his colleagues in that he found in the vast and open expanses of the prairies a kind of exhilaration and artistic inspiration:

I had never seen the plains or anything like them. They impressed me deeply. I cared more for them than for the mountains, and very few of my Western pictures have been produced from sketches made in the mountains, but rather from those



made on the plains with mountains in the distance. Whoever crossed the plains at that period . . . could hardly fail to be impressed with its vastness and silence and the appearance everywhere of an innocent, primitive existence. . . . [O]ften on reaching an elevation, we had a remarkable view of the great plains. Due to the curvature of the earth, no definite horizon was visible, the whole line melting away, even in that clear atmosphere, into mere air. I had never seen any effect like it. . . . Nothing could be more like an Arcadian landscape than was here presented to our view.⁶

Whittredge had an innate sense for handling panoramic spaces. Here, as he had before, the artist used half-sheets or partial sheets of paper.⁷ The long, narrow format allowed him to sketch the expansive plains without devoting most of the space to open sky. The result was a suite of sketches in which the enormity of the landscape is comprehended by this linear aspect, emphasizing the horizon. By devoting half his paper to land and the other half to sky he violated the "golden section" in both format and internal division of space, a departure from convention that allowed him to accomplish his purpose of retaining the sensation of being out on the limitless plains.

6. Whittredge, "The Auto-biography," 45–46; quoted in Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 112–13.

7. See Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 113. According to Alexander Katlan, Winsor & Newton made sheets measuring 19 × 24 and 23 × 30 in. "Nineteenth-Century Materials: The Artist's Tools and Materials for On-Site Oil Sketching," Albert Bierstadt symposium, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 24 January 1992.

While he was on his journey Whittredge began to experiment with the angle of vision in his paintings. In an oil sketch dated *June 27, 1866* (fig. 118), he arrived at the oblique angle along the Cache la Poudre River that he would employ in most of his finished paintings of the region. By focusing on the screen of trees at the water's edge, relegating the mountains to a distant wedge, he created a series of diagonals that made the internal structure of his paintings conform to more conventionally shaped rectangular canvases like *Crossing the Ford, Platte River, Colorado*, 1868–70 (fig. 119). The trees in the left foreground of this painting did not please the artist when he first painted them in 1868, and in a memorable passage in his autobiography Whittredge explained, "On my first visit to Denver I had made a sketch from near our camping ground, from which I had begun a large picture. The trees did not suit me. I remembered a group of trees I had seen on the Cache la Poudre River, fifty miles from Denver, which I thought would suit my picture better. I undertook the journey to make sketches of them. They were



Worthington Whittredge

CAT. 91

The Foothills, ca. 1870

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 11³/₄ × 19³/₄ in.

Inscribed verso: *The Foot Hills. Colorado / From Valmont near Boulder / by W. Whittredge*

Denver Art Museum collection, Gift of the Houston Foundation in Memory of M. Elliott Houston and Museum exchange, 1969.160



FIG. 118 Worthington Whittredge, *Long's Peak from Denver*, 27 June 1866. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. Inscribed *Long's Peak from Denver / W. Whittredge June 27 1866*. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming; Gift of William B. Ruger, 8.84



FIG. 119 Worthington Whittredge, *Crossing the Ford, Platte River, Colorado*, 1868-70. Oil on canvas, 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 69 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Courtesy of the Century Association, New York

finally introduced into the picture, much to its improvement.”⁸ The sketch in question appears to be *The Foothills* (cat. 91).⁹ The number of tack holes visible along the outer margins of the sketch indicates Whittredge made several outings to work on it. The several campaigns allowed the landscape to dry before he painted the sky and then, during a third session, reinforced the contours of the trees. Eventually Whittredge completed numerous canvases from his two trips west, in many of which he moved and recombined pictorial elements that together form a suite of western views focusing on the river, trees, and mountains of western Colorado.

8. Whittredge, “The Autobiography,” 64; cited in Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 119.

9. Janson, *Worthington Whittredge*, 119.

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Checklist of the Exhibition

Bierstadt, Albert

- Bison with Coyotes in the Background*, cat. 77, pp. 248-49
Butterfly, cat. 87, pp. 268-69
Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite Valley, California, cat. 82, pp. 258-59
Chimney Rock, cat. 72, pp. 240-41
Deer in a Mountain Home, cat. 85, pp. 264-65
Fishing Boats at Capri, cat. 69, pp. 234-35
In the Foothills of the Rockies, cat. 80, pp. 254-55
Nebraska [Territory]: Wasatch Mountains, cat. 74, pp. 242-43
Olevano, cat. 68, pp. 230-33
On the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate, cat. 75, pp. 244-45
Rocca di Secca, cat. 70, pp. 236-37
Scene in the Tyrol, cat. 67, pp. 228-29
Study of a Pronghorn, cat. 78, pp. 250-51
Surveyor's Wagon in the Rockies, cat. 71, pp. 238-39
The Trappers' Camp, cat. 76, pp. 246-47
Valley of the Yosemite, cat. 81, pp. 256-57
A View in the Bahamas, cat. 84, pp. 262-63
View of Chimney Rock, Ogalallah Sioux Village in the Foreground, cat. 73, pp. 240-41
White Horse and Sunset, cat. 79, pp. 252-53
Woodward's Garden Animal Studies, cat. 83, pp. 260-61
The Wreck of the "Ancon" in Loring Bay, Alaska, cat. 86, pp. 266-67

Church, Frederic Edwin

- Autumn in North America*, cat. 23, pp. 156-57
Bedouins in Camp at Night, cat. 39, pp. 184-85
Broken Column, the Parthenon, Athens, cat. 43, pp. 192-93
A Century Plant at Cotopaxi, Ecuador, cat. 34, pp. 176-77
Clouds over Olana, cat. 46, pp. 194-97
Cloudy Skies, Sunset, Jamaica, cat. 36, pp. 178-81
Evening Twilight, cat. 45, pp. 194-97
Horseshoe Falls, cat. 27, pp. 162-63
Iceberg, Newfoundland, cat. 32, pp. 172-75
Königssee, Bavaria, cat. 42, pp. 190-91
Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador, cat. 28, pp. 164-67
Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador, Shown from Riobamba, cat. 29, pp. 164-67
Mount Katahdin, cat. 26, pp. 160-61
Niagara Falls from Goat Island, Winter, cat. 25, pp. 158-59
Niagara Falls and Terrapin Tower, cat. 24, pp. 158-59
North Peristyle, Parthenon, Athens, cat. 44, pp. 192-93
Off Iceberg, Newfoundland, cat. 33, pp. 172-75
Palm Trees, West Indies, cat. 38, pp. 182-83
Rough Surf, Mount Desert Island, Maine, cat. 22, pp. 154-55
Storm in the Mountains, cat. 35, pp. 178-81
Study for Under Niagara, cat. 30, pp. 168-69
Study of a Zoomorphic Rock, Petra, cat. 41, pp. 188-89
Sunset, Jamaica (study for The After Glow), cat. 37, pp. 178-81
Twilight, a Sketch, cat. 31, pp. 170-71
View of El Deir, Petra, Jordan, cat. 40, pp. 186-87
Winter Landscape with Full Moon, cat. 47, pp. 194-97

Cole, Thomas

- Campagna di Roma* (study for *Aqueduct near Rome*), cat. 1, pp. 114–15
The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey (study for series *The Cross and the World*), cat. 6, pp. 124–25
The Pilgrim of the World at the End of His Journey (study for series *The Cross and the World*), cat. 7, pp. 124–25
The Ruins at Taormina, cat. 5, pp. 122–23
Sketch for *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm* (*The Oxbow*), cat. 2, pp. 116–17
Sketch box used by Thomas Cole, cat. 4, pp. 120–21
Study for "Dream of Arcadia," cat. 3, pp. 118–19

Cropsey, Jasper Francis

- Evening at Paestum*, cat. 48, pp. 198–99
The Lake, cat. 49, pp. 200–201

Durand, Asher B.

- Guard House, Catskill Mountains*, cat. 12, pp. 132–35
Hudson River Sketch, cat. 11, pp. 132–35
Nature Study, Trees, Newburgh, N.Y., cat. 10, pp. 130–31
Study at Marbletown, Ulster County, N.Y., cat. 9, pp. 128–29
Study from Nature, Bronxville, N.Y., cat. 14, pp. 138–39
Study from Nature, Hoboken, N.J., cat. 8, pp. 126–27
Study from Nature, Peekskill, N.Y., cat. 13, pp. 136–37
Study from Nature, Rocks and Trees, cat. 15, pp. 140–41

Gifford, Sanford Robinson

- The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine*, cat. 60, pp. 218–19
The Camp of the Seventh Regiment near Frederick, Maryland, cat. 59, pp. 216–17
Cardinal's Coach on the Campagna, cat. 61, pp. 220–21
Lake Maggiore, cat. 55, pp. 210–11
Lake Nemi (private collection), cat. 51, pp. 204–7
Lake Nemi (Ganz Collection), cat. 52, pp. 204–7
Lake Nemi (Toledo Museum of Art), cat. 53, pp. 204–7
Long's Peak, Colorado, cat. 64, pp. 224–25
Mist Rising at Sunset in the Catskills, cat. 57, pp. 214–15
Mount Mansfield (1858; George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum), cat. 54, pp. 208–9
The Roman Campagna, cat. 56, pp. 212–13
Valley of the Chug Water, cat. 62, pp. 222–23
A Winter Walk, cat. 66, pp. 226–27

Huntington, Daniel

- Portrait of Asher Brown Durand*, cat. 16, pp. 142–43

Jackson, William Henry

- Surveyors at Work* (photograph), cat. 63, pp. 222–23

Kensett, John Frederick

- At Pasture*, cat. 17, pp. 144–45
Franconia Notch, New Hampshire, cat. 21, pp. 152–53
The Hemlock, cat. 20, pp. 150–51
Niagara Falls and the Rapids, cat. 19, pp. 148–49
On the St. Vrain, Colorado Territory, cat. 65, pp. 224–25
Standing Artist, cat. 18, pp. 146–47

McEntee, Jervis

- Early Spring* (*Autumn Landscape*), cat. 50, pp. 202–3
Mist Rising near New Paltz, cat. 58, pp. 214–15

Whittredge, Thomas Worthington

- Encampment on the Plains*, cat. 90, pp. 274–77
The Foothills, cat. 91, pp. 274–77
Going to the Village, cat. 89, pp. 272–73
Market at Subiaco, cat. 88, pp. 270–71

Index

Note: Page numbers in *italics* denote illustrations.

- AA-U. *See* American Art-Union
- academy board. *See* artist's board
- Achenbach, Andreas, 8 n. 30
- After Icebergs with a Painter* (Noble), 73–74, 257
- Agassiz, Louis, 81 n. 65
- agave. *See* century plant
- album
 - ladies', 76, 90
 - of oil sketches, for William Cullen Bryant, 85, 176, 200
- Aldine*, 102
- Alexis, Grand Duke, 72
- Alison, Archibald, and associationism, 20, 23 n. 4, 30
- America, sense of self in, 20
- American Art-Union (AA-U), 63–64, 65, 66, 128
- Apollo Association. *See* American Art-Union
- art, effect of science on, 19, 20, 21–22, 37, 50, 81 n. 65
- art criticism, 17
 - in America, 20–21
 - and judgment on technique, 51, 58
 - and oil sketches, 65, 105
- artists
 - industry of, 54, 69
 - marketing by, 63, 66–67
 - and the press, 51
 - receptions by, 71–72, 73, 83
 - self-taught, 16, 30, 53
 - studios of, 69–73
 - training of, in America, 17–18, 30, 108–9
 - as travelers and explorers, 19, 29, 30, 37–38, 44 n. 30, 173
- artist's board, 26, 43 n. 6, 81 n. 80
- Artists' Fund Society, 84, 95 n. 4, 99, 247
- Artists' Reception Committee, 71
- art market
 - change in, 104
 - oil sketches and, 17, 63, 84–85
 - prices realized, 86, 102, 110 n. 12
 - see also* individual artists; sales
- "The Art Gallery" (wood engraving), 100
- art theory, American, 21
- associationism, 20, 23 n. 4, 30
- Atlantic Monthly*, 75
- "At Woodward's Garden" (Frost), 260 n. 48
- auctions, sketches for charity, 17, 84, 99
- Audubon, John James, 21
- Avery, George A., *Night View of the Camp*, engraving after Church, 76, 76
- Avery, Samuel P.
 - collection of oil sketches of, 17, 83, 86, 88–89, 244
 - as a dealer, 89
 - on Durand, 133
 - Kensett and, 88–89, 101
 - letters of, excerpts, 88–89, 133
 - and Magoon, 89
- Barbizon school, 21, 105, 106, 107
- Beer, S., Church's studio (photograph), 71
- Benjamin, S. G. W., 107
- Bertin, L.-F., 102
- Bierstadt, Albert, 228–69
 - accuracy, scientific and, 50
 - animals by, 38–39, 55, 56, 76–77, 77, 248–53, 260–61, 264–65
 - costume studies of, 231–32, 231, 232
 - decline in reputation of, 72–73, 107
 - early work of, 68, 80 n. 32
 - engravings after, 241, 265, 265

Bierstadt, Albert (*continued*)

- exhibitions of artwork of, 16, 68–69, 73, 84–85, 247
- field equipment of, 27
- gifts, oil sketches as, 229, 268
- Great Pictures of, 68
- industriousness of, 54
- letters of, 254, 254 n. 35, 266
- Malkasten (Hawksrest) and, 72, 91–92, 91
- and the National Academy of Design, 104
- oil sketches of, 55–57
- paints used by, 26
- prices realized by, 84, 247
- publicity and, 38, 75–76
- reviews of, 68–69, 77–78, 84, 100, 106–7, 256
- sale of work by, 69, 84
- self-portraits of, 40, 41
- sketches by
 - field, 54–55, 241
 - as souvenirs, 90, 269
 - studio, 55–56, 78, 78, 237, 240, 241, 256, 267
- studios of, 72–73, 74, 77, 78, 81 n. 77, 91, 94, 97 n. 68
- technique of, 247, 254, 265
- testimonials for, 68, 80 n. 24
- travels of, 38–40, 50, 75
 - in the Bahamas, 262–63
 - in California, 75, 77, 78, 256–60
 - in Europe, 53–54, 55, 146 n. 146, 228–37
 - to Niagara Falls, 168 n. 17
 - in the Pacific Northwest, 77, 266–67
- western subjects of, 38–39, 54, 55, 107, 238–51, 254–61, 264–67
- Whittredge and, 53–54, 80 n. 24
- working method of, 29, 53–57
- works by
 - Among the Wind River Mountains*, 243, 243
 - Arch of Octavius (Roman Fish Market)*, 231
 - The Artist Painting in Yosemite*, 40, 41
 - The Bernese Alps*, 229, 229
 - Bison with Coyotes in the Background*, 248, 249
 - Black Hills, Colorado*, 55, 56
 - Buckskin Horse*, 55, 56, 252
 - Buffalo Calves*, 76, 77
 - engraving after, 76, 77
 - Buffalo Chase*, 249, 249
 - Buffalo on Laramie Plains, Nebraska*, 243 n. 22
 - Butterfly*, 90, 268, 269
 - Cathedral Rocks in Winter*, 258
 - Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite Valley, California*, 258, 259
 - detail, 98
 - Champion Trotter*, 252, 253
 - Chimney Rock*, 240, 241
 - Cho-Looke, the Yosemite Falls*, 39, 40
 - Deer in a Mountain Home*, 77, 264, 265
 - The Emerald Pool*, 54
 - Fishing Boats at Capri*, 55, 234, 235
 - Head of Buffalo and Indian*, 39, 39
 - Indians Traveling near Fort Laramie*, 241, 241
 - In the Foothills of the Rockies*, 254, 255
 - Italian Costume Sketches of Two Figures*, 232, 233, 253
 - Italian Costume Studies*, 231, 231
 - Lake Lucerne*, 54, 57, 68, 107, 237
 - Landscape with Snow-capped Mountains*, 229 n. 1
 - Laramie Plains, Nebraska*, 243 n. 22
 - Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 256, 257
 - A Mountain Range with Black-tailed Deer*, engraving after, 265
 - 265
 - Mountain House*, 229 n. 1
 - Mountain Lake*, 229 n. 1

- Mountain Landscape*, 229 n. 1
- Mount Hood*, 29
- Native of the Woods*, 250, 250
- Near the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains*, 84
- Nebraska [Territory]: Wasatch Mountains*, 54, 242, 243, 247
- Olevano (Antiquarian and Landmarks Society)*, 231, 232
- Olevano (Saint Louis Art Museum)*, 230, 231, 232
- On the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate*, 229, 244, 245, 247
- Platte River, Nebraska*, 243 n. 22
- Rocca di Secca*, 229, 237, 237
- Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 84
- Scene in the Tyrol*, 228, 229
- Seal Rock*, 261, 261
- Seal Rock, Farallones*, 260, 261
- Storm in the Rocky Mountains*, 29
- Stormy Lake Scene, Pacific Northwest*, 267, 267
- Studies of Bison*, 38–39, 39
- Study of a Pronghorn*, 250, 251
- Surveyor's Wagon in the Rockies*, 238, 239, 254, 274
- The Trappers' Camp*, 84, 246, 247
- Two Horses*, 252, 253
- Valley of the Yosemite*, 55, 84, 247, 256, 256, 257
 - detail, 112
- A View in the Bahamas*, 262, 263
- View of Chimney Rock, Ogalallah Sioux Village in the Foreground*, 240, 241
 - engraving after, 241, 241
- View of Donner Lake, California*, 78, 78
- View from the Wind River Mountains, Wyoming*, 54, 55, 243
- View on the Kern River*, 107
- White Horse and Sunset*, 252, 253
- Wind River Camp, Lander*, 247, 247
- Wind River Country*, 54, 55
- Wind River Mountains, Nebraska*, 243 n. 22
- Wind River Mts., Nebraska*, 243 n. 22
- Winter in Yosemite*, 258, 259
- Woodward's Garden Animal Studies*, 260, 261
- The Wreck of the "Ancon" in Loring Bay, Alaska*, 266, 267

- Bierstadt, Charles, stereographs by, 91, 91
- Bierstadt, Eliza, 89
- Bierstadt, Rosalie Ludlow, 29, 263
- bit, artwork as, 50, 87, 89
- Blackler, W. G., 241
- Boston Athenaeum, 64
- Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, on Church, 162
- Boston Herald*, 94
- Bridgham, S. W., 67
- Brooklyn Eagle*, 103
- Bryant, William Cullen, 18, 176, 203
 - oil sketches as birthday present for, 85, 176, 200, 203
- buffalo, Bierstadt's sketches of, 38–39, 39, 76–77, 77, 248–49
- Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, exhibition by, 247
- Byers, William Newton, 29

- Canfield, Mary Cecilia, 226
- capriccio*, by Cole, 120, 121
- Casilear, John, 35, 84, 102, 144
- Catlin, George, 37
- Century Association (Club)
 - art collection of, 85–86, 96 n. 27, 142
 - Bryant and, 85, 176, 200
 - exhibitions of art at, 83, 86
 - memorial meetings held at, 101, 103, 104
- century plant (American agave), 176, 177
- Cervara, Italy, artists' festa in, 232
- Champney, Benjamin, 146
- Chase, William Merritt, 72
- Chief Pictures. *See* Gifford

- chromolithograph, of Church's *Niagara*, 67
- Church, Frederic Edwin, 154–97
- annotations by, 51–52, 164
 - apprenticeship with Cole, 33, 44 n. 44
 - damage to sketches of, 27, 190–91, 191
 - declining popularity of, 107–8
 - diary of, excerpts from, 184, 185
 - and Durand, 171
 - engraving after, 76, 76, 161, 161
 - exhibitions of sketches of, 16, 64, 65–68, 71, 85, 92–94, 159, 171
 - Gifford and, 76
 - Great Pictures by, 17, 52, 53, 67, 75, 162, 163, 169, 171
 - industry of, 103
 - and Inness, 107
 - letters of, excerpts from, 27, 40, 41, 75, 92, 93, 95 n. 14, 107, 108, 168, 180, 186, 187, 190, 194, 195
 - McEntee and, 80 n. 24
 - Magoon and, 59, 87–88, 156, 157, 199, 211, 212
 - and the National Academy of Design, 17, 67, 104
 - Noble on, 73–75
 - at Olana, 92–94, 107–8, 194–97
 - palette of, 158, 188, 188 n. 42, 195
 - patrons of, 40
 - plagued by insects, 27
 - prices realized by, 67, 75, 84, 86, 95 n. 19, 94–95 n. 24, 103
 - reviews of, 52, 67, 68, 99–100, 162, 171
 - sale of work by, 69, 86
 - self-promotion by, 66–67, 74, 160
 - sketches by, 53, 57, 107, 108, 110 n. 7
 - on exhibiting, 57
 - and finished paintings, 156–57
 - as gifts, 85
 - studio, 16, 158–59, 179, 180
 - and solicitations for work by, 89–90
 - studio of, 70–71, 71
 - technique of, 49, 108, 111 n. 51, 155, 159
 - travels of
 - in Germany, 29, 190–91
 - in Greece, 192–93
 - in Jamaica, 178–83
 - in Labrador, 52–53, 73, 173–75
 - at Mount Desert Island, Maine, 66–67, 66, 155
 - at Niagara Falls, 75, 155, 158–59, 168–69, 258
 - in Palestine (Petra, Jordan), 40–42, 75, 184, 186–89
 - in South America, 48–50, 53, 164–67
 - Tuckerman and, 22
 - working methods of, 29, 48, 50, 51–53, 75, 76, 108, 164–65, 168, 173, 174 n. 26, 184, 186–87
 - works by
 - Abandoned Skiff (An Old Boat)*, 66, 66, 155
 - The After Glow*, 94, 180, 180
 - study for. *See* *Sunset, Jamaica*
 - Autumn*, 88, 156, 157
 - Autumn in North America*, 87–88, 156, 156, 157, 244
 - detail, 46
 - Autumn, a Sketch*, 66
 - Bedouins in Camp at Night*, 42, 184
 - Blueberry Hill, Vermont*, 95–96 n. 24
 - Broken Column, the Parthenon, Athens*, 192–93, 192
 - Camels and Riders: Separate Study of Sailboat at Sea*, 40, 41
 - Campfire near Mount Katahdin*, 76, 76
 - Cayambe*, 49, 49
 - A Century Plant at Cotopaxi, Ecuador*, 85, 176, 177
 - Church's Farm, Hudson, New York*, 196, 197
 - Clouds over Olana*, 194, 196
 - Cloudy Skies, Sunset, Jamaica*, 179, 179
 - Column and Entablature Fragments, Athens*, 192, 192–93
 - Composition with Effects Observed—Chimborazo from Guaranda*, 164, 165
 - Damascus*, 93
 - Ed Deir Temple, Petra*
 - El Khasné, Petra*, 93
 - El Khasné, Petra, Jordan* (graphite and gouache; Cooper-Hewitt), 187, 187
 - El Khasné, Petra, Jordan* (oil and graphite; Cooper-Hewitt), 186, 187
 - European Mountain Landscape*, 27, 191, 191
 - Evening Twilight*, 108, 194, 195
 - Evening in Vermont*, 87, 88
 - Floating Iceberg*, 174, 174
 - The Heart of the Andes*, 53, 67, 84, 92, 171
 - Horseshoe Falls*, 67, 93, 162, 162–63, 163
 - Horseshoe Falls, Niagara, from Canadian Bank*, 168, 169
 - Hudson River Valley Landscape with Winding Stream*, 34, 34
 - Iceberg, Newfoundland*, 172, 173
 - Icebergs*, 174, 174
 - The Icebergs*, 52, 52, 53, 68, 74, 75
 - Jerusalem*, study for, 86
 - Königssee, Bavaria*, 190, 190
 - Labrador*. *See* *Seascape*
 - Moonrise*, 93–94, 97 n. 68
 - Morning in the Tropics*, 84, 84
 - Mountain Stream, Yemen Valley, Palestine*, 41, 42
 - Mount Cayambe, Ecuador*, 49, 49
 - Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador*, 164, 165
 - Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador, Shown from Riobamba*, 166, 166
 - Mount Chimborazo Seen through Rising Mists and Clouds*, 164, 167
 - Mount Desert Island, Maine*, 66, 67, 155
 - Mount Katahdin*, 160, 161
 - engraving after, 161
 - Niagara*, 67, 86, 162, 163
 - Niagara Falls from Goat Island, Winter*, 158–59, 159, 258
 - Niagara Falls and Horseshoe Falls*, 162–63
 - Niagara Falls and Terrapin Tower*, 158, 158, 258
 - North Peristyle, Parthenon, Athens*, 193, 193
 - Off Iceberg, Newfoundland*, 174, 175
 - Olana from the Southwest*, 194, 195
 - An Old Boat*. *See* *Abandoned Skiff*
 - Oosisoak*, 85, 85, 95 n. 14
 - Palm Trees, West Indies*, 182, 183
 - Rainy Season in the Tropics* (detail), 71
 - Rough Surf, Mount Desert Island, Maine*, 154, 155, 159
 - Scene on the Magdalene River*, 87
 - Seascape (Labrador)*, 173, 173
 - Small Waterfalls near Castleton, Vermont*, 95–96 n. 24
 - Storm in the Mountains*, 178–79, 178
 - Study for "The Icebergs,"* 52, 53
 - Study for New England Scenery*, 86
 - Study for Under Niagara*, 75, 93, 168, 169
 - Study of a Zoomorphic Rock, Petra*, 188, 189
 - Summer in South America*, 87, 88
 - Summer Sunset from Olana*, 108, 109
 - Sunrise*, 93–94, 97 n. 68
 - Sunset; Color Effects*, 108, 109
 - Sunset from Olana*, 195, 195
 - Sunset, Jamaica* (study for *The After Glow*), 93, 94, 179, 180, 181
 - Sunset, Jamaica, West Indies*, 180, 180
 - Sunset over Hills, Jamaica*
 - Sunset in Vermont*, study for, 86
 - Tequendama Falls near Bogotá, Columbia*, 49, 50
 - Twilight, Short Arbiter 'Twixt Day and Night*, 87
 - Twilight, a Sketch*, 67–68, 93, 99–100, 170, 171

- Church, Frederic Edwin (*continued*)
Twilight in the Wilderness, 67, 86, 95 n. 19, 171, 171
Under Niagara, 75, 169
Valley of Yemen, Palestine, 41, 42
View of Chimborazo, 164, 167
View of El Deir, Petra, Jordan, 186, 186
View in Pittsford, Vermont, 65
Winter Landscape with Full Moon, 196, 197
- Church, Isabel, 93, 178
- Church, Isabel "Downie," 94
- Church's Painting: The Heart of the Andes* (Noble), 67
- Civil War
 effect of, on art, 84, 111 n. 29, 257
 Gifford's service in, 216-17
- Claude (Lorrain), 35, 44 n. 40
- Cole, Thomas, 114-125
 allegories of, 65, 119, 124-25
 annotations by, 31, 31
 on art and nature, 47-48
 and Bryant, 85, 176
 camp stool of, 120
capriccio by, 120, 121
 Church and, 33
 Claude and, 44 n. 40
 Durand and, 29, 33, 35, 36, 99, 119, 125, 126
 early plein-air work of, 34
 essay by, on landscape painting, 19-20
 estate sale of, 115
 as the first pleinairist, 29
 and Kensett, 144
 letters of, excerpts from, 31, 32, 47-48, 119
 Magoon's holdings of work by, 87, 96 n. 33
 marketing by, 33
 memorial exhibition for, 17, 99, 124-25
 methods of working, 53
 paints of, 26, 43 n. 11
 patrons of, 30, 31
 on plein-air painting, 30, 51
 plein-air sketching by, 29, 30-31, 33-37, 47-48
 self-portrait of, 116
 sketch, *trompe-l'oeil*, 118, 119
 sketch box used by, 120, 121
 studio sketches by, 48, 117, 124, 125, 125
 as a teacher, 33
 technique of, 127
 travels of
 in the Catskills, 29
 in Italy, 115, 120
 works by
 Aqueduct near Rome, 115, 115, 213
 study for. *See Campagna di Roma*
 Campagna di Roma (study for *Aqueduct near Rome*), 114, 115
 Catskill Meadow, 33-34, 34
 The Course of Empire (series), 48, 48
 Desolation, 48
 study for, 48
 The Cross and the World (series), 48, 99, 124-125
 Desolation. *See The Course of Empire*
 Dream of Arcadia, 119
 Morning on Niagara, 31
 Mount Etna from Taormina, 123
 The Oxbow. *See Sketch for View from Mount Holyoke*
 View from Mount Holyoke
 Panorama of the Oxbow on the Connecticut River, as Seen from Mount Holyoke, 116-17, 117
 The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey (study for series *The Cross and the World*), 124, 124, 125
 The Pilgrim of the World at the End of His Journey (study for series *The Cross and the World*), 124-25, 125
- Protestant Cemetery*, 93
- The Ruins at Taormina*, 122, 123
- Sketch for *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow)*, 31-33, 35, 115, 116, 116
- Study for "Dream of Arcadia," 118, 119
- Vallombrosa, 96 n. 33
- View of the Campagna di Roma (Ruins on the Campagna)*
- View from Mount Holyoke, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow)*, 32, 218
 detail, 32
- The Voyage of Life* (series), 48
- Youth, 124
- collectors, of oil sketches, 17, 83-94
see also Avery; Magoon
- Companion to Heart of the Andes* (Winthrop), 67
- completion, defined, 18
see also finish
- Congdon, Charles, 210
- Constable, John, 23 n. 20, 35, 36, 107, 108, 145
 work by, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 145, 145
- Cook, Clarence, 105
- Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 101
- Cooper, James Fenimore, 18-19
- Cooper Union, art collection of, 101, 110 n. 7
- Cornelius, Peter von, 231 n. 3
- Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, 18, 20, 69, 86
- Cosmos* (Humboldt), 53
- Cottier, Daniel, 105
- Cranch, Christopher Pearse, 120, 132, 146, 199
- Crayon, The*
 on artists' travels, 38
 "At Home" page, 69, 69
 on Bierstadt, 68
 on criticism, 65, 105
 on Durand, 35
 on private collectors, 88
 sales announcements in, 89
 as a source of instruction, 18, 20, 22, 50
see also Durand, Asher B., "Letters on Landscape Painting"
- Cropsey, Jasper Francis, 133, 198-201
 criticism of, 54
 engravings after, 18
 exhibitions of, 71
 Magoon and, 87, 88, 199
 Niagara Falls and, 168 n. 17
 prices realized by, 86, 88, 89, 199
 sale of work by, 89
 works by
 Evening at Paestum, 198, 199, 244
 detail, 82, 88
 The Lake, 85, 200, 201
 Study of Starucca Vale, NY & E.R.R., 88
- croquis*, 17
- Curtis, George W., 70, 76, 161
- deForest, Lockwood, 76
- deism, and landscape painting, 21, 257
- Delano, John, 237
- Dewing, Thomas Wilmer, 104
- Dime Savings Bank, Bierstadt's studio in, 73, 74
- Dodworth's Hall
 exhibitions at, 17, 63, 68, 71, 83
 studios in, 70
- Douglass, A. E., 89
- draftsmanship, 21, 36
- drier, copal, 26, 43 n. 10
- Dunlap, William, 29, 30

- Dunraven, earl of, 72, 77
- Durand, Asher B., 116–41, 143
 the Century Association and, 85
 Church and, 171
 Cole and, 29, 33, 35, 36, 99, 119, 125, 126
 and Daniel Huntington, 142
 engravings after, 18
 estate sale of, 17, 106, 128
 exhibition of work of, 64, 71, 86, 128, 141, 142
 as the first pleinairist, 35, 127
 influences on, 35
 and Kensett, 35, 102, 144
 Lanman and, 88
 "Letters on Landscape Painting" (*Crayon*), 16, 21, 36, 45 n. 47, 51, 88, 136, 142
 letters of, excerpts, 35, 127
 memorial exhibition for, 86
 methods of working, 35, 36
 paints of, 26
 portrait of, 24, 142–43
 as president of the NAD, 16, 64, 68, 171
 prices realized by, 86, 128
 sale of work of, 84, 89, 96 n. 48, 106
 sketches, plein-air, 48, 130, 214
 studies from nature, 17, 18, 21, 29–30, 35, 36, 64, 65, 71, 80 n. 46, 96 n. 51, 100, 106, 126–43
 and solicitations of artwork by, 90
 studio, 106, 106, 128
 technique of, 128, 133, 141, 217
 travels of, in England, 144
 works by
 The Beeches, 35, 36
 Guard House, Catskill Mountains, 35, 133–35, 134
 Hudson River Sketch, 35, 132, 132
 June Shower, 133, 133
 Kaaterskill Clove, 86, 86
 Landscape with a Beech Tree, 35, 36
 Landscape, Sunset, 127, 127
 Nature Study, Trees, Newburgh, N.Y., 130, 131
 Rocky Cliff, 141
 Study at Marbletown, Ulster County, N.Y., 128, 129
 Study for the Catskill Clove. See *Kaaterskill Clove*
 Study from Nature, 64, 126, 128 n. 6
 Study from Nature, Bronxville, N.Y., 138, 139
 Study from Nature (exhibited 1844), 128 n. 6
 Study from Nature (exhibited 1845), 128 n. 6
 Study from Nature, Hoboken, N.J., 35, 126, 126, 127
 Study from Nature, Peekskill, N.Y., 136, 137, 138
 Study from Nature, Rocks and Trees, 140, 141
 Study in Jacob's Valley, near Kingston, 128 n. 6
 Study near Marbletown, 128
 Study of Trees, Catskill Mountains, 130, 130
 Study of Trees and Rocks, Catskill Clove, 135, 135
 View near Marbletown, 128
 White Mountain Scenery, 142 n. 14
 White Mountain Scenery, Franconia Notch, N.H., 142, 142
- Durand, John, 35, 127
- Düsseldorf Academy, 53–54, 146 n. 8, 231
- Eastlake, Sir Charles, 88
- Ecole des Beaux-Arts, 17
- Ed Deir Temple (Petra, Jordan), 186, 186
- Edmonds, Francis, 128
- Edwards, Amelia, 93
- Eldorado* (Taylor), 254
- Elkins, Henry A., 29
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 21, 59
- engravings, 17, 18, 76, 161, 161
- esquisse*, 17
- "Essay on American Scenery" (Cole), 19–20
- estate sales. See sales
- étude*, 17
- exhibitions
 artists' studios and, 69–73
 at artists' houses, 90–94
 memorial, 17, 99, 102–4
 of sketches, 16, 56–57, 61 n. 29, 83
 social-club, 17, 83, 86
 see also American Art-Union; National Academy of Design
- Fabre, François-Xavier, 102
- Farallone Islands, California, 260–61
- Fielding, Copley, 88
- fieldwork, sketching and, 19, 50–51
- finish
 debate over, 105
 defined, 18
 field sketches and, 47
 as metaphor, 19
- frame, shadow box, 272
- Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, "Receptions at the Tenth Street Studios, 1869," 72, 73
- Franklin, Sir John, 74
- Frost, Francis Seth, 242
- Frost, Robert, 260 n. 48
- Gifford, Sanford Robinson, 204–14, 216–22, 224, 226–27
 and the Artists' Fund Society, 95 n. 4
 Artists' Reception Committee and, 71
 Avery and, 89
 cabinet pictures by, 59
 and the Century Association, 104
 Chief Pictures by, 58, 59, 209, 209
 and Church, 76
 Civil War service of, 216–17
 damage to sketches of, 27, 43 n. 4, 205
 debt to Cole of, 218
 depression of, 205–6
 estate sale of, 17
 exhibition of sketches of, 64, 65, 71
 journal of, 204, 210, 213, 220, 224, 233 n. 7, 234 n. 9
 and Kensett, 222, 224
 letters of, excerpts from, 26–27, 59, 205, 217, 217 nn. 27–29
 see also journal of
 and McEntee, 104, 214–15, 219, 220
 Magoon and, 87, 210, 213
Memorial Catalogue of work by, 58, 218
 memorial exhibition for, 86, 104
 methods of working, 51, 57–59, 224
 and the National Academy of Design, 104
 oil sketches of, 57, 59
 studio, 16, 58
 prices realized by, 86, 104
 reviews of, 104, 106
 sale of work of, 78, 84, 104
 sketching equipment of, 27, 43 n. 14
 technique of, 104, 209, 217
 travels of
 in the Catskills, 214–15
 in Colorado, 222–24
 in Europe, 37–38, 58
 in Germany, 27
 in Italy, 204–7, 210–13, 220–21, 231 n. 3, 232, 234, 270
 in Switzerland, 26–27
 and Whittredge, 104, 214, 222, 224
 working methods of, 58–59

Gifford, Sanford Robinson (*continued*)

works by

- The Artist Sketching at Mount Desert, Maine, frontispiece*, 214, 218–19, 218, 226
“Bierstadt at the Piccola Marina, Capri” from *Italian Sketchbook*, 26
The Camp of the Seventh Regiment near Frederick, Maryland, 216, 217
“Capri”: *Two Sleeping Donkeys and a Man’s Head in Profile*, 234, 234
Cardinal’s Coach on the Campagna, 214, 219, 220–21, 220
The Castle at Chillon, 80 n. 45
Isola dei Pescatore, Lago Maggiore, 210
Lake Maggiore, 59, 87, 199, 211, 213, 244
Lake Nemi (for Lizzie Mulock), 206
Lake Nemi (Ganz Collection), 14, 58, 59, 205, 206
Lake Nemi (private collection), 58, 204, 205
Lake Nemi (Toledo Museum of Art), 58, 205, 207
Long’s Peak, Colorado, 57, 224, 224, 225
Mist Rising at Sunset in the Catskills, 214, 214, 219
Mount Mansfield (George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum), 208, 208
Mount Mansfield (Manoogian Collection), 209, 209
Nemi, 58, 204, 205
The Roman Campagna, 59, 87, 199, 212, 213, 244
The Shrine of Shakespeare, 87, 87
A Sketch at Mount Desert, Maine, 218, 219
A Sketch of the Villa Malta, Rome, 206 n. 8
Sketch from Nature, 65
Sunrise on the Bernese Alps, 87, 87
Valley of the Chug Water, 222, 222
The Wilderness, 80 n. 45
A Winter Walk, 226, 227

gift book, 18, 76

gifts, oil sketches as, 85

Gignoux, Regis, 65

Gilmor, Robert, 30, 31, 35, 47, 64

Gilpin, William, 20

Golden Era, 75, 77–78

Goupil’s (gallery), 78

Gowing, Sir Lawrence, 26

Great Picture. *See* Bierstadt, Albert; Church, Frederic Edwin

Greenough, Henry, 120

Gridley, A. D., 217

Hall, Basil, 117

Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, 38, 76, 161

Hawksrest. *See* Bierstadt, Albert, Malkasten

Hayden, Colonel Ferdinand V., 222–23

Hayes, Dr. Isaac, 85

Heade, Martin Johnson, 70–71, 107

Heart of the Andes (Winthrop), 67, 161

Heart of the Continent, The (Ludlow), 76, 241

Hicks, Thomas, 86, 146

Home Book of the Picturesque, The, 18, 76

Home Journal, 94

Homer, Winslow, 110 n. 7, 216

horses, by Bierstadt, 55, 56, 252–53

Hotchkiss, Thomas Hiram, 258

houses, artists’, as exhibition spaces, 90–94

Hubbard, Richard, 84, 208

Hudson River school, 16, 105, 106, 107, 176

Humboldt, Baron Alexander von, 21–22, 53, 92

Huntington, Collis, 78

Huntington, Daniel, 84, 86, 88, 101, 105, 142

works by, *Portrait of Asher Brown Durand*, 142, 143

detail, 24

Hunt, Richard Morris, 70

Hunt, Samuel Valentine, *View of Chimney Rock, Ogallallah Sioux Village in the Foreground*, engraving after Bierstadt, 241, 241

Hunt, William Morris, 105

icescape, 52

impressionism, American, 16, 107

Inigo (Charles Henry Webb), 78

Inness, George, 22, 104, 105, 107, 108, 153

Isham, Charles, 88

Ishmael (pseudonym), 94

Jackson, William Henry, 222

Surveyors at Work (photograph), 223, 223

James, Henry, 105

Jesup, Morris K., 96 n. 27

Johnson, David, 65

Johnston, Joshua Taylor, 86, 95 n. 19

Kensett, John Frederick, 144–53, 214

and the Artists’ Fund Society, 95 n. 4

Avery and, 88–89, 101

the Century Association and, 85, 101, 103

and Cole, 144

Constable and, 145

copies of his own work by, 65, 89

and Durand, 35, 102, 144

engravings after, 18, 76

estate sale of, 17, 149

exhibition of sketches of, 64, 65, 70

and Gifford, 222, 224

in his studio (photograph), 70

industry of, 103

in Italy, 146

“Last Summer’s Work,” 102–3, 151

letters of, excerpts from, 35

Memorial Catalogue, 103

memorial exhibition, 86, 101–4, 101

National Academy of Design and, 101, 101

New York Sanitary Fair and, 84

prices realized by, 65, 79 nn. 10, 11, 85, 86, 88, 96 n. 27, 102, 110 n. 14

reviews of, 64–65, 70, 102, 103

sale of work of, 84

sketches of, 16, 65

studio of, 70, 70, 149

technique of, 151, 153

travels of, 45 n. 49

in the Catskills, 35

in Colorado, 222, 224–25

in England, 144

to Niagara Falls, 148–49, 168 n. 17

works by

At Pasture, 144, 145

Chicago Lake, 151, 151

Coast Scene, 85

Franconia Notch, New Hampshire, 152, 153

Glenellis Falls, New Hampshire, 153, 153

The Hemlock, 86, 150, 151

Lake George, 96 n. 27

Mt. Chocorua, 96 n. 27

Niagara Falls and the Rapids, 70, 148, 148, 149

detail, 62

On the St. Vrain, Colorado Territory, 224–25, 225

Raven Hill, Elizabethtown, Essex County, 65

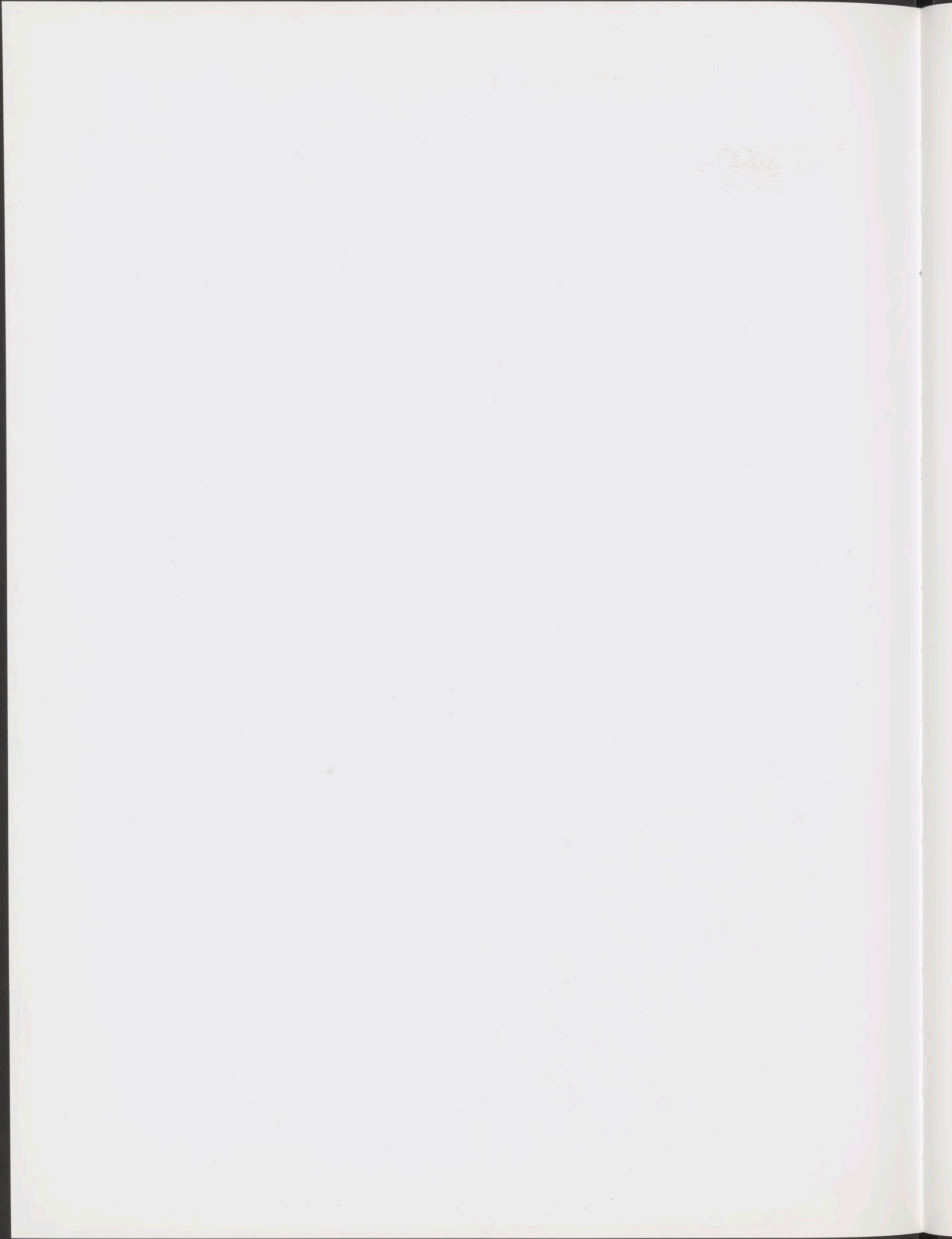
Scene among the Catskills, 65

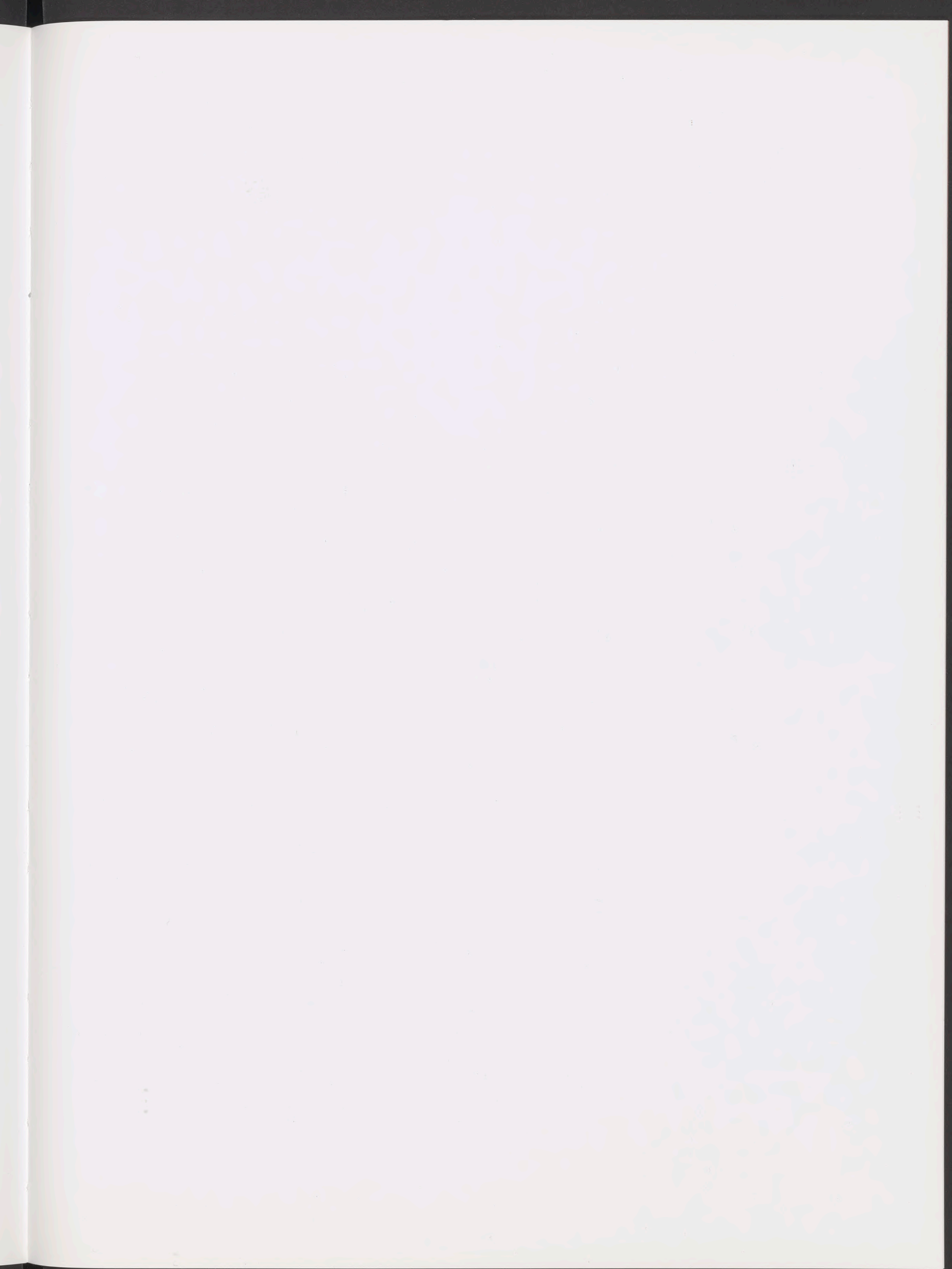
Scene on the Cauterskill, 65

- Snowy Range and Foothills from the Valley of Valmont, Colorado*, 102, 103
Standing Artist, 25, 146, 147
Study of Beeches, 151, 151
Study from Nature, 65
Sunset at Sea, 103, 103
Suspension Bridge, Niagara Falls, 149, 149
Whirlpool, Niagara, 149, 149
King, Thomas Starr, 257
- Ladies' Repository*, 241
LaFarge, John, 105
Lander, Colonel Frederick V., survey by, 38, 238, 241, 242
landscape painting, 16, 51
 art criticism and, 18, 20
 Bryant and, 85, 176
 and cultural progress, 18, 20
 as a genre, 19–20, 27
 Humboldt on, 53
 philosophy of, 21, 106
 science and, 37, 50
 and sketches for, 19
Landseer, Sir Edwin, 88, 102
Lanman, Charles, 83, 88
Leslie, C. R., 145
Lessing, Friedrich, 80 n. 24
letters, as travelogues, 38, 40, 41, 42
Letters from a Landscape Painter (Lanman), 88
Leutze, Emanuel, 60 n. 18, 71, 80 n. 24, 84
Life in the Open Air (Winthrop), 160–61
Literary World, 22
lithographs, art market and, 76
Long Expedition (1819–20), 28, 37
Long, Major Stephen, 28, 45 n. 58
Lotos-Eating: A Summer Book (Curtis), 76
lottery, artworks distributed by, 64
Ludlow, Fitz Hugh, 75, 241, 249, 257
 on Bierstadt's working methods, 27, 29, 38–39, 76, 248, 250, 252
- McEntee, Jervis, 202–3, 215
 Avery and, 89
 Bryant and, 203
 the Century Association and, 85, 86, 95 n. 18
 Church and, 80 n. 24
 diary of, 214, 221
 exhibition of sketches by, 65
 Gifford and, 104, 214–15, 219, 220
 in Italy, 220, 221, 221
 and the National Academy of Design, 80 n. 24, 104
 prices realized by, 221
 review of, 203
 works by
 Autumn Landscape. See *Early Spring*
 Early Spring (*Autumn Landscape*), 85, 202, 203
 Journey's Pause in the Roman Campagna, 220, 221
 Mist Rising at Sunset near New Paltz, 214–15, 215, 219
 Mt. Desert, Maine, 219, 219
- Magoon, the Reverend Elias Lyman
 and Avery, 89
 and Church, 59, 156, 157, 211, 212
 collection of oil sketches of, 17, 83, 86–88, 199, 244
 and Cropsey, 87, 88, 199
 essay by, 18
 and Gifford, 87, 210, 213
 sale of collection by, 101
Malkasten (paint box), club, 60 n. 18
 see also Bierstadt, Albert, Malkasten (Hawksrest) and marketing, industry as a technique for, 69
Meissonier, Jean-Louis-Ernest, 60 n. 29
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 103–4
Michallon, Achille-Etna, 102, 110 n. 12
Mignot, Louis Rémy, 164
mill board. See artist's board
Minneapolis Industrial Exposition, First, 84
Moran, John, 50, 72
Moran, Thomas, 110 n. 7, 168 n. 17, 223
Morse, Samuel F. B., 18, 64
Mount, William Sidney
 diary page, 28
 exhibition of sketches of, 65
 as the first pleinairist, 44–45 n. 45
 Lanman and, 88
 portable sketching studio of, 28, 28
Mulock, Lizzie, 206
Muybridge, Eadweard, 260
- NAD. See National Academy of Design
National Academy of Design (NAD), 16
 Bierstadt's diploma picture for, 244–45
 decline of, as an authority, 67, 72, 104–5
 exhibitions at, 63, 99–100, 128, 142
 founding of, 18, 63
 rejections by, 105
 sketch room of, 17, 64, 65
 training and, 30, 108
 see also Durand, Asher B.
Nazarenes, 231, 231 n. 3
New York Evening Post, 171, 200, 203
New York Sanitary Fair, 84, 95 n. 7, 247
New York Times, 78
Noble, Louis Legrand, 67, 73–74, 173, 257
- Olana. See Church, Frederic Edwin, at Olana
Olana State Historic Site
 front parlor, 93–94, 93
 Petra Room, 92
Osborn, William H., 40, 75, 92, 93, 187, 188, 190
Osgood, the Reverend Samuel, 103
Overbeck, Friedrich, 231 n. 3
- painting, easel, standards for judging, 65
paints
 for plein-air sketching, 33, 43 n. 11
 transporting, 26
Palmer, Erastus Dow, 40, 187, 194
paperboard. See artist's board
Parsons, Charles, 107
pasteboard. See artist's board
Patriotic Fund Sale, 84, 247
patronage
 changes in, 72, 83
 the oil sketch and, 16
Peale, Titian Ramsay II, 21, 28, 28, 37
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 64
Philadelphia, centennial exhibition at, 105–6
photograph
 of Church's studio, 71
 of Kensett, 70
 Surveyors at Work (Jackson), 223, 223
pleinairists
 encouragement for, 20
 the first, 29, 35, 44–45 n. 30, 127
pochade, 17
Pope, General John, 274
press, the. See artists, and the press

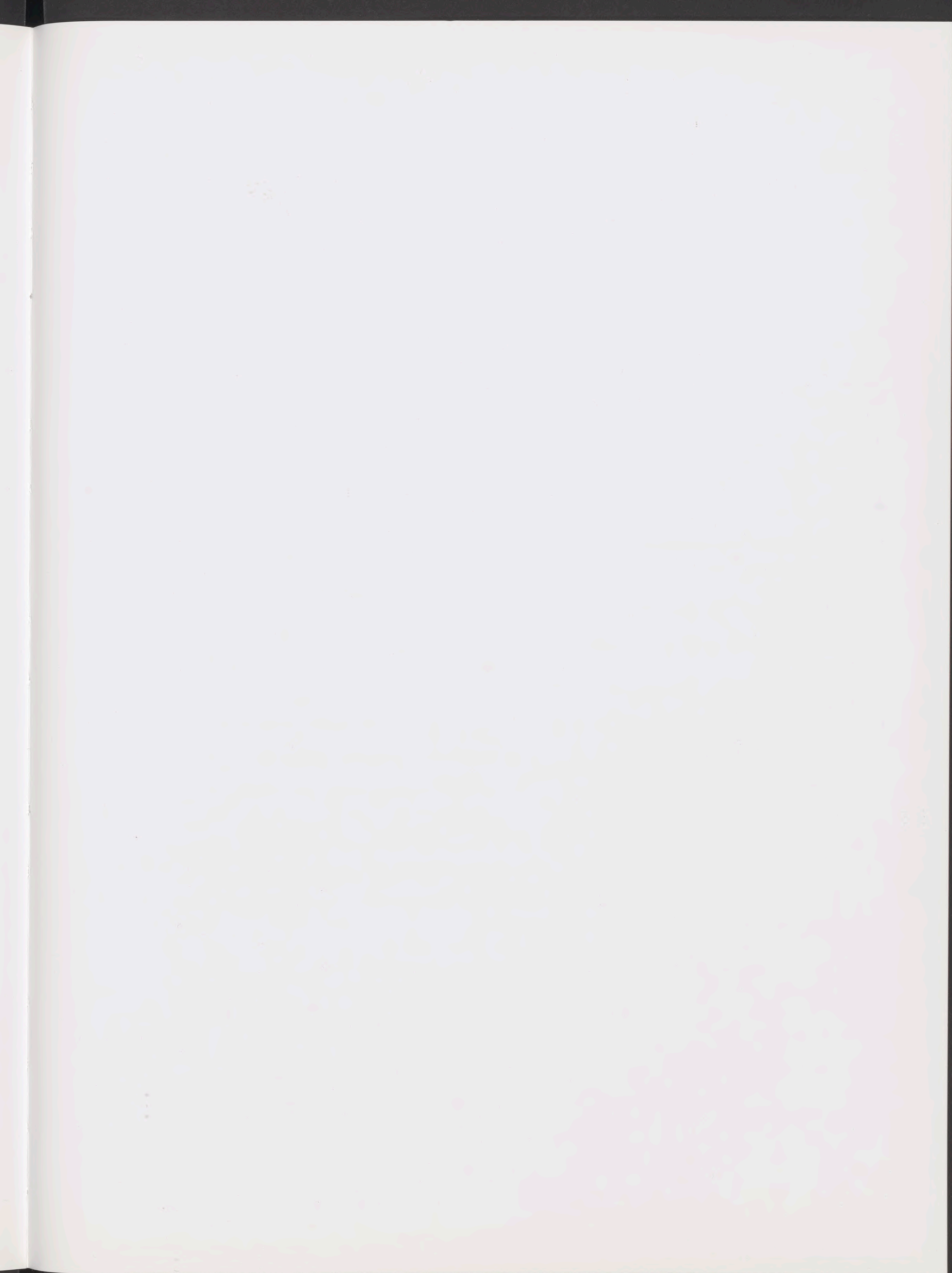
- prints, and the fine-art market, 76
 publicity. *See* travel for
- Rand, John Goffe, 43 n. 12
 Ranney Fund, 83
 see also Artists' Fund Society
 Ranney, William Tylee, 83, 88
 Reconstruction, 104, 111 n. 29
 Rensselaer Building, 73
 "Return of the Birds, The" (Bryant), 203
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, treatises on art by, 17–18
 Rossiter, Thomas P., 144
 Royal Academy (London), 17, 18
 Ruskin, John
 and Durand, 36
 influence of, 21, 23 n. 19, 35, 50, 66, 104, 136
 on truth and art, 21, 51
- Saint-Gaudens, Augustus, 105
 sales, 72, 89
 of collections, 89, 101
 estate, 17, 106, 128, 149
 fund-raising, 84, 99, 247
 Tenth Street Building, 84, 247
San Francisco Daily Alta California, 77, 100
 Sanitary Fair. *See* New York Sanitary Fair
 science. *See* art, effect of science on
Scribner's Monthly, 76
 Shattuck, Aaron Draper, 89
 Sheepshanks collection (England), 145
 Sheldon, George W., 51, 57, 59
 Sherrerd, William D., 86
 Shillaber, B. P., 229, 229 n. 2
 sketch
 abstract, 105
 aesthetic standards and, 17, 22, 65, 99–100, 104–8
 codification of stages of, 17
 collectors and, 16, 89
 Constable on, 107
 damage to, 43 n. 16
 defined, 17, 18
 exhibition of, 56–57, 61 n. 29, 63–79, 91–92
 field, 47, 54–55, 241
 finished, 19, 64, 65, 99–100
 insects on, 27–28
 marketing of, 75
 modern perceptions of, 16
 plein-air
 defined, 19
 Humboldt on, 53
 and landscape paintings, 20, 33
 as studio creations, 16, 19, 50
 preference for, 83
 as preliminary work, 16, 50, 75, 89–90, 108
 purpose of, 15–16, 47, 48, 74–75, 108
 sales of. *See* sales
 size of, 17, 26, 68, 78, 214
 solicitations of, 89–90
 transporting in the field, 27, 43 n. 4
 as trophies, 17, 37
 sketch box, 26, 121
 sketching
 as direct impression, 35
 equipment for, 16, 25–27, 30, 33, 37, 43 n. 14, 146
 fieldwork for, 19
 logistics of, 25–26, 26
 Slosson, Edward, 86
 Society of American Artists (SAA), 17, 79, 105
 souvenirs, sketches as, 90, 268, 269
 Stedman, Edmund, 59
 Stillman, William James, 23 n. 19
 studio
 as exhibition venue, 70–73, 90
 show, 72
 study, defined, 18
 Sturges, Jonathan, 86
sur le motif, plein-air work and, 19, 50
 surveys, of the American West, 19, 37
- taste, and the exhibition of sketches, 64
 Taylor, Bayard, 18, 92, 254
 Tenth Street Studio Building
 Bierstadt at, 57
 Church at, 51, 70–71, 71
 exhibitions at, 17, 63, 83
 sales at, 84, 247
 studios in, 70–71, 214, 214 n. 21
 Thompson, Launt, 52, 75
 Thompson, Thomas, 68
 "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe" (Bryant), 176
 tonalism, 104
 travel, accounts of artists', 38–40
 for publicity and marketing, 19, 29, 37, 67
 see also artists, as travelers and explorers
 Troy, New York, Durand's sketches exhibited at, 64
 Trumbull, John, 29
 truth
 accuracy as, 21
 and art, 20, 21, 31, 51
 and science, 21
 Tuckerman, Henry
 on Bierstadt, 38, 106–7, 248–49
 on Church, 22, 108, 183
 essay by, 18
 on landscape painting, 29
 Turner, J. M. W., 30
- Union Club, exhibition of art at, 83
 Union Red Cross, 84
- Valenciennes, Pierre-Henri, 110 n. 12
 Vassar College, art collection of, 100–101
 Vassar, Matthew, 100–101
 Vernet, Claude-Joseph, 30
 Victoria, Queen, 72
 Vivian, Arthur Pendarves, 77, 265
- Wanderings in the Western Land* (Vivian), 77, 265
 Warner, Charles Dudley, 57
 Watkins, Carleton, 260
 Waverly House, 63, 70
 Webb, Charles Henry (Inigo), 78
 Weeks, Alice Delano, 237, 237 n. 13
 Weir, John F., 58, 88, 104, 105–6, 153
 Western Pennsylvania Exposition Society, Second Annual, 84–85
 White, John, 214
 Whittredge, Thomas Worthington, 270–77
 autobiography, excerpts from, 222, 270, 274–75
 and Bierstadt, 53–54, 80 n. 24
 and the Century Association, 86, 95 n. 18
 and Gifford, 104, 214, 222, 224
 on the influence of Ruskin, 21
 and the National Academy of Design, 105
 sale of work of, 84
 technique of, 271, 275–76

- travels of
 - in Europe, 53, 270
 - in the West, 274, 277
- works by
 - Crossing the Ford, Platte River, Colorado*, 276, 277
 - Encampment on the Plains*, 224, 274–75, 275
 - The Foothills*, 276, 277
 - The Glen*, 272
 - Going to the Village*, 272, 273
 - Long's Peak from Denver*, 276, 277
 - Market at Subiaco*, 270–71, 270
 - Market near Subiaco*, 271, 271
- Wilde, Hamilton, 233 n. 7
- wilderness, the American, and landscape painting, 20
- Williams, Stevens, and Williams (publishers), exhibition of
 - artwork by, 67
- Williams, Virgil, 260
- Willis, N. P., 18
- Winsor & Newton, 26, 43 n. 12
- winter, sketching in, 158, 159, 196, 196, 227, 258, 259
- Winthrop, Theodore, 51, 67, 160–61
- Woodward, Robert B., 260
- Woodward's Gardens, San Francisco, 260
- Wordsworth, William, 35
- writers, professional, and publicity for artists, 74, 75–76
 - see also Ludlow, Fitz Hugh; Noble, Louis Legrand
- Wyant, Alexander Helwig, 104
- Yale University, Trumbull Gallery at, 101
- Yosemite, California, 256–59
 - Bierstadt's views of, 77–78, 84, 98, 112









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